緋弾のアリア
Aria the Scarlet Ammo
赤松中学
コラテラル・ブロス
Gの血族
XI
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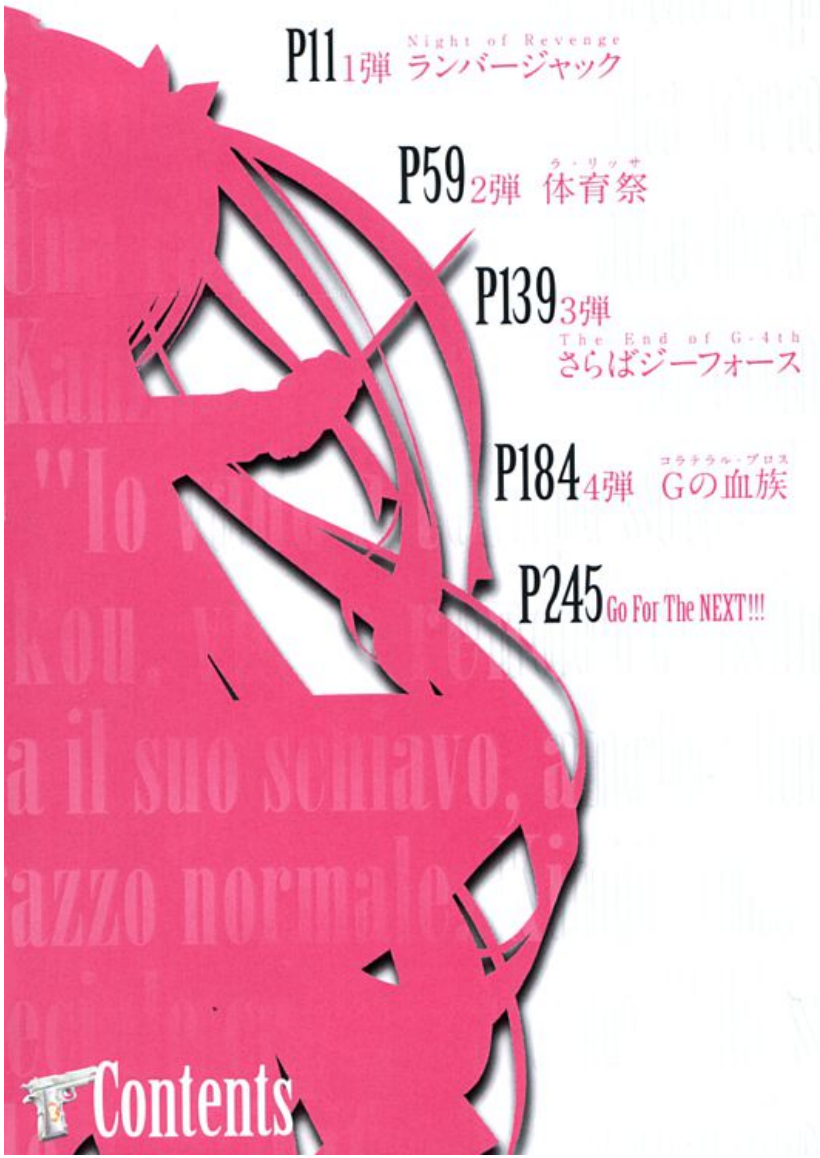
Hidan no Aria - Volume 11
G Bloodline -Collateral Bros-



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- Illustrations
- Chapter 1: Lumberjack–- Night of Vengeance
- Chapter 2: Sports Festival–- The Brawl
- Chapter 3: Farewell G-4–- The End of G-Fourth
- Chapter 4: The G-Bloodline–Collateral Bros
- Epilogue
- Credits

緋弾のアリアXI

Aria the Scarlet Ammo

Gの血族（コラテラル・ブロス）

赤松中学

MF文庫J

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生年月日、不詳。出身地、御台所に栄える まで生まれ不明の電波作家。「アストロノト！」で第3回MF文庫ライトノベル新人賞最優秀賞受賞。本作・武装学園の前（緋弾のアリア）は、同作家の2シリーズ目となる。

【イラストレーター】

こぶいち

中すソフト所属の原画職員。
代表作は「SSばん！」「エ×E」「星空カナタ」「天神乱漫」「ロ〜ぶるぃわ〜ぐ」。
小説では「これはゾンビですか？」第2共通部）の挿絵を担当。
趣味はゲーム、読書。
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メディアファクトリー

緋弾のアリアXI　Gの血族

東京武偵高校。そこは武力を行使する探偵——通称「武偵」を育成する特殊な学校。強襲科Aの超エリートでSランクの最強武偵・アリアのパートナーに選ばれてしまった【普段は】ただの一般人・遠山キンジ。【探偵】と【尋属】の争いに身を投じたアリアとキンジ。その最中、キンジは自称「妹」のかなめと同居生活中だ。この事態に慌ってはいられないバスカービル女子の面々が、かなめに「決闘」を申し込む。キンジはその決闘でかなめ共に行くことになり——？　バスカービルがキンジの敵に!?TVアニメ化もされた、大スケールアクション＆ラブコメディー第11弾!!

赤松中学の本

- アストロノト！ 1〜3 （イラスト・bami）
- 緋弾のアリア （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアII 燃える緋女 （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアIII 強襲魔の剣 （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアIV 星空と緋弾 （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアV 尋問の終止線 （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアVI 絶対平和2015 （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアVII 火と風の行舞 （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアVIII 緋緋の天空祭 （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアIX 蒼き閃光 （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアX 緋焔の覚醒 （イラスト・こぶいち）
- 緋弾のアリアXI Gの血族 （イラスト・こぶいち）

緋弾のアリアXI

Aria the Scarlet Ammo

Gの血族（コラテラル・ブラッド）

赤松中学

Chapter One.

Chapter 1: Lumberjack–Night of Vengeance

One autumn afternoon…

「The Texan burgers are delicious! Right, Onii-chan?」

「They're about the same as usual.」

「But if you eat them with the person you love, they are 10 times more delicious!」

「…」

Out in the open, under the blue sky, Kaname and I are eating hamburgers at a McDonald's in Odaiba. Because it is an elegant new building near the countryside, it is one of the more popular date sites. In fact, to anyone who does not know the chilling truth, Kaname seems like a normal school girl– average. At first glance, the scene alone would suggest that she was no more than a pretty middle-schooler with a beautiful smile on an after-school date.

So it would seem…

「Mmmm… What a perfect day! Perfect weather for a date with my perfect brother, Onii-chan.」

She is my self-proclaimed 'little sister', Kaname Tohyama. When she switches to her aggressive 'personality channel'[1], she is able to destroy footbridges, throw grenades, or threaten me with a kitchen knife– just to get me to do something. She just might be able to destroy Odaiba in about 30 minutes.

She is a very dangerous girl.

And what the hell do you mean by 'date with my brother'!?

Don't say such improper things so loudly, Kaname! Also, I don't understand how someone could eat hamburgers, while drinking a Caramel-latte– McDonalds has soda. As Jeanne might say: '*I guess this is how it's done in the world.*' or something like that, as I mumble something about my *own* rules.

Well, they say: '*Autumn is the season of cravings*[2]'…

I am sipping my soda, but I have little appetite. I'm nibbling on a burger, completely immersed in 'Gloom Mode', not eating enough to break into a rave review. I've been traumatised ever since the stand-off between Kaname and Shirayuki that occurred in my apartment.

「I-I challenge you to a duel! In that case, any accidental deaths would be acceptable! To ensure the stability of the Tohyama household, and allow peace to reign in the 'Land of the Rising Sun', we must fight this match to a final conclusion!」

Bursting into my apartment, Shirayuki found Kaname, and after shouting this 'declaration of war', began firing the gun she was carrying. Kaname laughed cheekily and ran around the room, dodging the hail of bullets that Shirayuki– a demonic glare on her face– unleashed. The weapon was an M60, a machine gun capable of full-automatic bursts.

The bullets showered the room like drops of water from a sprinkler. In the end, the barrel of the M60 overheated and started to 'cook off'[3]. Even though it was equipped with heat dispersal equipment, Shirayuki's furious assault overcame the safety features. She fired her gun tirelessly, with no intention to stop until she had exhausted all her bullets, but when the barrel was finally warped by the heat, precluding its use, she detached it and let it fall to the floor.

「That was just the beginning. You will receive a formal challenge to a duel later, so enjoy what little time you have left.」

Shirayuki said this as parting shot, then left.

But…

The next day, (After shooting hundreds of bullets, as if it were a proper sort of greeting) while I tried to get over the shock, Student Council President Shirayuki, returned to visit, as always, resuming the appearance of a pure, peaceful, and overwhelmingly kind girl. Kaname was not in the apartment.

「Oh my! What has happened here?」

She entered, and diligently set about repairing my mostly destroyed room. It was not long until it was perfectly rearranged, but…

Shirayuki… You were the one who made this mess. Remember…?

It was as if she were suffering from dissociative identity disorder.

Shortly afterwards, she was smilingly cleaning of the house, but when she passed near Kaname's clothes or toothbrush, her expression changed to one full of rage and jealousy, as if she wanted to destroy them with a glance. Finally, when Shirayuki had finished, she left the whole house a testament to her hard work.

When Kaname returned she was smiling happily, but sensing who was responsible, she shot the same look of rabid jealousy at Shirayuki's handiwork.

Hey, I have to deal with this every day. I can sum it up two words:

It's scary…

Thinking back, it was easier to endure Aria's violent nature. She resorted to direct physical attacks, but in contrast I spent less time fearing for my life. Both of them usually show affection in their own way, but this diametric change of personality… It's like opening a Jack-in-the-box and no good for my heart. It's a change as exaggerated as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, complicating everything and multiplying my problems by two.

I was taking some heart medicine[4] with my soda, when…

Chirp! *Chirp!*

Suddenly, the sparrows on the terrace took flight in fear.

「Oh…!」

I gasped.

She's here!

「…」

With a white ribbon atop her head, Shirayuki, dressed in her bulletproof school uniform, was there to greet me with a pleasant smile; but when she turned to Kaname, she began to radiate a murderous aura that frightened the sparrows off the terrace.

Kaname meanwhile seemed to say '*Hi!*', and waved at Shirayuki. But her expression… False and hidden feelings filled the room with

an air of seething anger. The dark auras emanating from both of them ended up spoiling the clear blue, autumn sky.

I had invited them both out to eat, and now began to watch them in the same way a professional wrestling referee might eye the competitors.

「Good afternoon, Kin-chan… Ah!」

Trip!

Shirayuki, missing her step, lost her balance, and stumbled, but somehow avoiding falling on the floor. As always, she seems to have bad reflexes.

「Looks like we're all here. Shirayuki, you can order a burger or something.」

I said, as we sat at our table.

「Okay.」

Shirayuki raised her hands and…

Clap! *Clap!*

She clasped her hands after clapping… but soon after, a '?' symbol appeared over her head, and she started looking from side to side.

For a moment, the three of us sat at the table silently. Then I realised. What Shirayuki had done was the way to call the waitresses in a traditional Japanese inn …I think…

Ah, that's right. She lives in a temple and has hardly gone anywhere except school… She probably hasn't been to a McDonald's. There's no other choice… I'll have to help her order.

On the other hand, believing that McDonalds will offer as much care as an inn… I think there should be a limit on how clueless a person can be.

How secluded is that temple?

That's some medal-worthy, Olympic-class cluelessness.

If you are wondering why I invited them to this place, it is because of the duel that Shirayuki had challenged Kaname to. This was

precipitated by Kaname's surprise attack on the Baskerville girls. Now she, Aria, Riko, and Reki as well, were seeking revenge. With Shirayuki as their representative, the 'army' of Baskerville girls and Kaname are in a situation where a single spark could ignite a powder keg of conflict. This battle would become a huge war, large enough to threaten the security of Butei High, or even cause it to sink[5].

Before that happens, it's my job to play UN and mediate between the two sides. So, in order to solve this peacefully, I tried to establish formal negotiations. That's why I chose a table at this restaurant. It is naturally crowded with civilians, so with Kaname and Shirayuki– all too ready to to wield a machine gun or kitchen knife–, there would be many potential witnesses. At the moment, I found myself carrying a teriyaki burger on a tray and headed to our table while Shirayuki followed me spell-bound.

「So then… Shirayuki, sit there. Listen up. We're outside Butei High, so put aside your personal issues. No guns, knives, or fuss. Fighting is strictly prohibited. Kaname, the same goes for you too.」

Feeling more hopeless as I spoke each word, as I watched both, I sat Shirayuki in front Kaname. From both sides, Shirayuki and Kaname were giving fake smiles so stiff, you would have thought they were wearing Noh theatre masques.

Umh… Ugghh… My stomach hurt. This is no good.

「Okay, now for the death sentence.」

Without warning, Kaname said the worst thing possible.

「A moment ago, when Onii-chan was buying a burger, this fake girl[6] had hearts fluttering around her head.」

She said this while biting her straw, then her mouth began to smoke… This heat was produced by friction… Now the straw was melting!

What is this huge jaw strength! It rivals the bite force of an alligator or a shark.

Across from her, Shirayuki was eating her teriyaki burger quietly as she sipped her drink with a confident smile.

「It must be hard to not be the favourite wife, so it is impossible for

you to be calm!」

From this corner, too, came the most provocative words possible.

And what do you mean by 'favourite wife'?

Well, it's normal for you to say such nonsense[7], but this is not remotely the right time to do so!

I have to do something soon to negotiate this peacefully.

「Don't get so hostile. The whole reason for this meeting was for the two of you to reconcile.」

「Kaname, the favourite wife is the strongest. In this world, it is destined to be so, and I will not give one inch.」

「What an illogical thing to say! Younger sisters are stronger, and I won't give in either.」

Ugh, this is impossible.

Seeing that from the beginning, neither had the slightest intention of listening, I started thinking about my escape route, but suddenly from both sides.

「The favourite wife!」

「Obviously, younger sisters!」

Thump! *Thump!*

Shirayuki and Kaname, each grabbed me at the same time. Both of my arms and are now engaged in a tug-o'-war as they grapple and pull for their respective side. I remember long ago, I got caught in a similar disagreement between Riko and Aria, literally being in the middle of the discussion.

Divide everything exactly in half and give each of them a part… of my pictures. That thought crossed my mind.

「Kaname, I've done a bit of research and you are registered as a Butei in the US. Although, I could not find anything else.」

「*Humph* That data hasn't been deleted… So? What about it?」

They glared at each other defiantly.

「Then you're a Butei, as well. As fellow Butei, the rules do not allowed us to fight each other, except in the course of fulfilling a contract. For that reason, we of Baskerville have decided to challenge you to a re-match[8] to fight our official representative. The match will take place according to the strict rules of Butei High.」

「H-Hey! Don't decide anything without talking to me, your Team leader!」

「…And after we consulted together, I was chosen as the official representative.」

Obviously that 'we' did not include myself.

「Heeh.」

Kaname made a puzzled expression, but it gradually changed into a belligerent smile.

In Butei High, the first of the unwritten rules from MASTERS states:

'Avoid frequent dueling. But, in all cases, please adhere to a fair set of rules.'

In other words– duels are allowed. They are illegal in Japan, but at this bloody school, they have been tolerated up to a point. Because of the laws, no matter what happens, no lawsuits can be filed, and if someone cried to the police: '*I was injured in a duel!*' They'd immediately become the laughingstock of the school.

「Onee-chan, You really are completely illogical. You still don't understand which one of us is stronger, yet?」

「That was an official acceptance, right?」

Bzz! *Bzz!* *Bzz!*

Sparks flew like an omen of a great fight.

After a few seconds, Kaname finally released my arm.

「Obviously. Then, Onee-chan, I guess it is time that I returned *'this'*. I've already finished my analysis.」

At that instant, perfectly calculated so that the people around us didn't notice, something fell from the sky.

Catch!

Letting go of my other arm, Shirayuki, grasped the object from the air. It was sheathed in a scarlet case, a Japanese katana.

「Irokaneayame!」

When I looked up, an 'X' shaped piece of cloth was twirling approximately thirty metres above us. It was the same equipment Kaname had used a few days ago to block Aria's bullets and slice through a foot bridge. It looked like a floating Bamboo-copter.

It seems that Kaname, looking ahead, had made prior preparations in case something happened.

「Onee-chan, this katana is your main weapon, right? It would be unfair if we fought before I returned it.」

「Unfair? I did not expect someone like you to use that word…」

Shirayuki laughed derisively, covering her mouth with her hand, while Kaname answered without looking up.

「After our last 'meeting' Onii-chan scolded me, saying, '*Don't do "cowardly things"*'. I took this lesson to heart. You should too… don't do anything cowardly… Like this!」

And, just as a waitress passed near our table, Kaname grabbed her butt.

「*Kyaa!*」

The girl cried, while her beautiful silver hair swayed through the air. With a visor on her head that was intended to conceal her identity, turning to our table was…

「J-Jeanne?! What are you doing here?」

Former member of IU, and now fully integrated into INFORMA, a second-year student at Butei High: Jeanne D'Arc.

And turning towards Jeanne, whose cover was blown, Kaname opened her blue eyes wide in apparent amazement.

「Wow! So beautiful! Onii-chan, you really can't resist a pretty girl, huh?」

Kaname said, hanging her head.

「First Onii-chan woos, Shirayuki Hotogi: 'The Blazing Fire Witch' and now Jeanne D'Arc, 'The Silver Ice Witch'. It makes me want to start a 'witch hunt'. Two on one is no disadvantage.」

Kaname proudly boasted.

Head lowered, from the shadow of her straight-cut bangs, Shirayuki's eyes gleamed.

「Did you think there would just be two of us?」

Wh-What is happening in this peaceful setting… A McDonald's in the afternoon…?

I began to scan the area…

Yes, unfortunately. They're all here! Dressed as part-time restaurant workers.

In the kitchen, with the distinct shape of guns hidden under her skirt, Aria is frying potatoes.

At the cash, and thoroughly enjoying the situation, is Riko– she wasn't there a minute ago.

Aloof, and on the edge of the terrace, Reki is cleaning the floor with a mop.

And if we look in the shadow of the pot nearby, Haimaki is is partially visible.

We are being surrounded, completely.

「Waah! Onii-chan, I'm afraid. Everyone is bullying me.」

While Kaname uttered that phrase lifelessly, she pounced, hugging me close. Taking advantage of this position, she surreptitiously grabbed and pinned my arms. Kaname has made me a hostage.

「This is really all your fault, Kaname. Why do you do things to make everyone hate you?」

To make matters worse, I am aware that my value as a hostage is virtually nil. It's pathetic. There is nowhere for me to go. Then I started to separate from Kaname.

「Just kidding!」

Kaname said, quickly releasing me.

「All of you are totally unreasonable! It seems you haven't learnt your lesson yet. This time, I'll pound you into hamburger meat!」

Kaname shouted, threatening the Baskerville girls (+Jeanne). While I could only laugh and reflect on my horrible luck.

Then Shirayuki said,

「Don't worry Kin-chan, we won't attack now. We'll take care of it later. Kaname lacks all common-sense and could lose control at any time. That's why I called the others. Ufu, ufufufu.」

「Is that so…?」

Because I was a little scared, I slipped into keigo[9]. It seems that she too, had also made preparations for this meeting.

「This is advance notice of the form of duel we have chosen. Kaname, given the current situation, can you guess how you will be 'loved'? [10]」

Kaname heard Shirayuki's question that seemed like it was taken straight out of a school exam, and and her eyebrows drew together in puzzlement.

「…!」

I also grimaced, but my eyebrows moved up–the opposite of Kaname–, because unlike her, I knew the answer.

「L-Lumberjack!?」

「As expected of Kin-chan, that's right! Considering that Kaname is from America, we have chosen a form of duel that originated in her own country.」

Smiling, Shirayuki changed her 'dark'[11] expression to a sweet one as she turned towards me.

Lumberjack…!

Right after I enrolled in this school, I fought another guy, bare-handed, in that kind of duel. That is how I know what it is. At Butei High, it is the 'house specialty' and is also considered one of the most difficult and dangerous types of duels.

As Shirayuki said, it is derived from a form of dueling common among American Lumberjacks, with a few changes. The official rules seem simple– and they really are.

First, all participants must wear bullet-proof equipment.

Next, the Butei involved spread out to form a 'Ring'[12] of Butei (To be referred to as 'Loggers'), and this 'Ring' encloses the dueling ground.

Lastly, contestants must fight within the Ring, and are prohibited from leaving it.

The duel ends when one side admits defeat, or if one party is judged to have reached a point where outside assistance is required.

Those are the only rules, but these rules have additional clauses:

If any of the contestants leave the Ring before the end of the match, the 'Loggers' may attack freely, taking any action necessary to return them to the ring. If the contestant returns to the ring, their opponent is able to attack them once more. Thus, between retreat and return to the ring, the duelists slowly take damage, and eventually you will find them fighting on the brink of death, with quite serious injuries.

In short, running away is stupid. It's a hellish system that beats you– even in retreat.

Additionally, it is not required that the 'Loggers' who form the Ring are neutral. The Ring is comprised of allies and enemies alike. This means that if you are generally disliked, the Ring will be full of your enemies.

That is the most dangerous rule for Kaname!

Of course, your opponent will not be attacked by their friends, so even if you force them out of the ring, they will be allowed to return unmolested. Conversely, if you are cornered and forced out of the ring, you will be greeted with a merciless hail of bullets. Due to that rule, Lumberjack shares many similarities with government regulation and penalties.

In this situation, Kaname has no allies, and as a result of her unilateral hostility, it is all-against-one.

「Girls, Lumberjack is an old fad. Even though in was created at Butei High, accidents are too common. It is a savage game and not something that girls should be involved in. Stop this.」

I frowned as I said those words, and Shirayuki replied…

「Don't try to stop us Kin-chan. There are times where even girls must fight!」

Her long, silky black hair swayed as she shook her head in gesture of denial.

「This is a Holy War–a conflict ignited by love for Kin-chan! One in which the objective to secure the sovereignty of a country called 'Kin-chan', inevitably leads another country,'Shirayuki', to declare war on the nation 'Kaname'.」

An incomprehensible and contradictory National Strategy for 'Shirayuki'.

「That's…!」

Although Shirayuki usually has a quiet and gentle nature, there are times that she can be just as belligerent as Aria.

「No problems here. I'll do it. What about *Kamerad*[13]?」

Kaname replied quietly as she ate the rest of her burger. As calmly as if she'd just asked: '*Do you take milk with your coffee?*', replying in a care-free manner. Even though I had gone to so much trouble to put out a lifeboat.

「It is allowed. Do you have some friends that you'd like to bring?」

Taking her silence as acceptance, Shirayuki concluded …

「Well then… This will be a legal 'Kaname-do over'[14]…」

Looking on and smiling with her dark-side activated, she offered that 'kind' advice.

I'll explain the details of *Kamerad*.

Kamerad is a right that the Loggers have:

'A person permitted to provide direct assistance to a contender, once, in

the course of the duel'

To prevent the duel from reaching a stalemate, it is customary to choose a person to step in when the victor has obviously been determined, and also to prevent overkill from happening by separating the contenders when a loss has been determined. However, from my experience, once the duel actually starts, these niceties matter very little.

「I wasn't asking for myself– I will not require any assistance. I was talking about you, Onee-chan. Why, I'll crush you until you can't even concede your own defeat. So you'll need someone else to do it for you then, right?」

Kaname replied as she mirrored Shirayuki's devilish grin.

What a disaster…

After finishing her Texan burger, Kaname made a pellet from the wrapper and…

Whoosh!

Threw it strongly, like a Slug Shot[15] and succeeded in making the rubbish can.

****

On the following night, under the moonlight…

The agreed place for the match was Arena #2[16], ASSAULT Division's Gym. Kaname was there, wearing her bulletproof school uniform, striking a daunting pose.

On her back she carried a large, unsheathed katana almost as tall as she was. Between the ridge and groove[17], a fluorescent blue light shone. It is no ordinary blade. This is the same weapon she used to ambush Team Baskerville– cutting-edge weapons technology: a mono-molecular vibration sword.

For someone who has below average grades in Physics and Chemistry, this is something I don't understand, so here is how Kaname explained it:

According to her, the edge of the blade has a wire a few molecules wide that revolves like a power saw. The wire is made up of a chain

of carbon atoms only visible through a microscope, yet it possesses a hardness of 10 Mohs[18].

From my perspective, it would be something like a chainsaw with tiny diamond teeth.

「With that, there is almost nothing you can't cut through.」

After she said that, subconsciously, I began favouring Kaname.

Half a year ago I remember having a similar conversation with Shirayuki, but when compared to the idea of a supernatural source for her powers… Kaname's explanation seems much more believable.

I was pondering that when Shirayuki, led by Jeanne, arrived on the scene, kicking up sand with each step as they approached. Aria and Riko followed, and now all of the concerned parties had arrived.

What's this?

As I would gain nothing by regretting it later, and since Kaname had me concerned, I ended up attending the duel.

Shirayuki came dressed in her family's traditional gold-trimmed Miko attire; but also wore a white headband that tied behind her head. Her sleeves were secured behind her back, and in one hand she carried Irokaneayame, sheathed in a red lacquered scabbard.

Yes, that's the same dress she wore in April, when she confronted Aria in a similar situation: the battle dress of the Hotogi family.

The others wore their bulletproof school uniforms, but Jeanne brought the legendary sword Durandal, fastened to her waist.

Aria, as usual, carried her twin guns strapped to her legs under her skirt, moving with her and occasionally revealing some 'Gun-chira'[19].

And finally, Riko came smiling; hugging her beloved M1887 shotgun.

All were ready, willing, and determined to participate in the duel.

Kaname greeted them thus:

「Girls, you are *so* late. I got tired of waiting.」

Saying this, Kaname drew her thumb across her throat in an earnest motion.

「Let's see … Fake girl[20], The Diva[21], Shorty, The Flirt[22]. Huh? What about The Loner?」

Kaname indicated each girl as she spoke, except Reki.

I guess that makes Jeanne 'The Diva'.

「She already has you in her sights.」

Aria exclaimed angrily while shaking her twin tails.

Apparently, all four are quite aware that their nicknames have some degree of accuracy.

「This Arena constitutes the Ring. You cannot escape. Reki's accuracy is 99%. I've never seen her fail, except once, and that time it was a misfire.」

And just for the record, that misfire was my doing, so it's still 100%.

「Girls, I'll say it again: 'Stop this.' It's not that I don't understand how you feel–being the victims of a surprise attack–, but this is childish. Come up with a better way to resolve your differences.」

As leader of Baskerville, I tried to say something sensible, but like it was straight out of a Western, my deputy shot me an angry look.

「You're an absolute pacifist who won't go anywhere near ASSAULT, but Kinji… this is our reality as Butei. Problems are solved by personally getting out there and fighting– with gun in hand and lead.」

Aria spoke those words, fit for a gunman from an old Western… but in her seiyuu-like voice.

「Even so, you're only trying to get even. By that logic, Kaname is the perfect Butei! What *other* reason do you have for a grudge?」

I returned her angry stare and as I glared back, Aria's face suddenly flushed red.

「It's not like I am doing this to steal you back from Kaname, or anything like that!」

When she noticed that she said something out of character, she made an embarrassed face, as if to say '*What am I saying?*', then composing herself, she drew her twin silver Governments.

「By the way, this weapon now has 'PASTEL' inside, unlike the last time she ambushed us.」

'PASTEL', are the Butei bullets that were provided by the Vatican. She believes Kaname took advantage of the fact that she only had normal .45ACP bullets then, and Kaname seemed to understand what she implied…

「Did you think *that* was the problem? How naïve can you be!」

Kaname scoffed…

You're wrong Kaname. This time is different.

You boast of your superior strength, and you're too proud to consider it… but, when people carry out a carefully planned surprise attack, their battle power actually increases many times. And if you want to face a Butei of Aria's class…

Underestimating her would be fatal. You understand that, right?

「Kanamee has been monopolizing Ki-kun lately, so we are all in 'yandere mode'…」

Giving Kaname a subtle[23] nickname, with shotgun in hand, Riko made the gesture of horns with her fingers…

Kachin!

She pumped her shotgun and primed it for the next shot.

As anyone who has gone up against a Shotgun knows… That sound… it's so awe-inspiring. It will always cause a unique feeling of fear.

「If you find the need to escape, come with me. We'll have some fun! Kufufu.」

It is common knowledge that, under certain conditions, it is possible to dodge bullets fired from a gun. When the unlikely opportunity presents itself, it is simply a matter of evasion. Bullets only trace straight paths, therefore it is not totally impossible to deduce the trajectory of the shot from the conditions in which it

was fired.

But the shot from a shotgun is impossible to dodge. The shells contain several projectiles that disperse over a large area. They are designed to hit the enemy, without targeting a specific point.

Also, Riko's shotgun is sawed-off– a shotgun whose barrel has been cut down to size. This is not only a way to help hide the gun, but to also to increase the spread of projectiles and the area of dispersal.

Being honest, even for the '*me*' in Hysteria Mode, shotguns are a not weapon I'd like to face.

「Heh Heh Heh. Lumberjack… How nostalgic, right Ki-kun?」

Turning towards me while smiling… near Riko's feet… there are two shadows! I guess Hilda came too. Well, in her case, she could have followed unannounced. Just when I was beginning to imagine Hilda's fiendish figure…

「Kaname, have you said your prayers?」

Shiing!

A clear sound rang out as Jeanne unsheathed Durandal.

「I'll be Shirayuki's *Kamerad*. In addition, I will also fulfill my duty as part of the Ring, though I might have to interfere directly.」

Jeanne warned as she finished putting her hair up into braids and tied them atop her head. That hairstyle is a sign that she has gone into battle-mode.

Her too?

「And I thought you wouldn't participate in such a barbaric thing.」

I said, making sure that only she could hear me. She turned, and with her blue eyes, glared angrily.

「The only reason I must participate, is because you are useless, Tohyama.」

「Now it's my fault?」

「A few days ago, I told you to bring Kaname over to DEEN '*in a*

certain way‘? 」

What ‘*way*‘? Oh…! She’s talking about *Romeo*[24]. That was crazy! As if it were going to do it! Let alone with someone who calls themselves my ‘*little sister*‘!

「And by the look of the current situation– You have failed. 」

「Success. Failure. Labels are meaningless! It was a plan that you tried to force on me– regardless of my opinion or consent. 」

「As I was not attacked by Kaname directly, in the beginning I stayed neutral in their case. That is why is that I approached the girls of Baskerville. I patiently explained the details of what you had to do to win Kaname. I even made drawings to help them imagine those situations… 」

Wait…? What did you do, Jeanne?!

「Still, the relationship between them has not improved at all… 」

「What did you expect? Discussing such a plan, even though I never planned to go through with it! 」

「The current situation demands that my original plan be altered, and we must now use this obscure duel to assimilate Kaname. 」

I glared at her, but despite everything I said, Airhead-Jeanne had an expression of ‘?’ on her face…

She raised her estoc, displaying it for Kaname to see, as it reflected a bluish sheen in the moonlight.

「More importantly… This girl called me ‘*cowardly*‘, when we were at the hamburger shop. 」

Hamburger shop…? Do you mean McDonalds’? You were practically moving on tip-toe and sneaking around that day– all of you were.

「I am neither a coward nor unfair, and through fair combat, I will teach her that lesson. Furthermore, in Butei High being defeated by a junior student is a matter of disgrace. No matter what, I cannot show my back in retreat to a junior student. 」

It seems she doesn’t remember the day of the Cosplay Cafeteria when her fans among the junior students found her cosplaying as a waitress, and she fled with all her might.

Argh, damn it! I could point out so much that is wrong with that statement, but my words just seem to vanish.

「Yeah, whatever you say… A clash of Far East Warfare or whatever you want to call it. Nnn.」

And Kaname stuck out her tongue at Jeanne.

Shirayuki, who had hitherto remained disturbingly quiet, began to approach, revealing red hanao with their getas on her feet, sand crunching beneath them.

「Kin-chan, stay back, because tonight there are no Ririi Particles[25].」

Ririi Particles… I think they are invisible particles that fall like rain and cause the disruption of Extra-Sensory Powers, like a 'Stealth Jammer'[26]. If these particles have not fallen today, that means Shirayuki can fight at full-power, without restraint– unlike previously.

Kaname, this time things are different and especially dangerous.

「The Ring is ready, and all that's left is to go over the rules.」

Shirayuki remarked casually and drew her katana. Suddenly, only Jeanne and Shirayuki were near me, with Kaname standing a little farther away.

Aria and Riko– in order to avoid friendly fire– had retreated to a middle distance with an angular separation of 60 degrees between them. Separated by another 60 degrees, I glimpsed Haimaki by gym storage shed, wearing bullet-proof vest. I guess Reki is in charge of that area.

These girls actually took the time to come up with a plan.

Although there is a clause that restricts the number of Loggers in the ring to a single digit number, there are no restrictions on the distribution of the participants.

The girls of Baskerville, taking our position as the centre, have positioned themselves in concentric rings. When you think of it that way, their current positioning makes sense.

First, one of the duelists– and carrying a Japanese katana–, was

Shirayuki, who would confront Kaname with a close range weapon.

The next closest to the battle after Shirayuki– and no less skilled in the art of the sword– is Jeanne, the swordswoman.

If Kaname could somehow slip past them, she would be in the gun-prodigy Aria's firing line at medium range, while also facing Riko and her shotgun.

Kaname cannot escape the mid-range circle.

Even if she miraculously did, it would be impossible to escape Reki's 'Magic Trigger'.

With all this in place, even the '*me*' in Hysteria Mode could not escape.

「Kaname, this is too dangerous. The trap they have devised is 'Concentric Encirclement', and you know what that means, right? This is a 'Kill-zone'. There is no way out!」

From inside of the deadly rings, I tried, desperately, to warn her. But, as usual, she just laughed without a care.

「Just admit you were in the wrong and apologize. I'll take care of the rest and find some way to make it right. You should have at least an inkling of the immense danger you are in!」

She answered matter-of-factually…

「That is completely illogical, Onii-chan. A dinosaur isn't scared of a bunch of ants. Onee-chan, actually, there really is no need for such a large Ring…」

Her short school uniform skirt fluttered as she hopped on one foot like an elementary school girl playing hopscotch in the park. Dragging her shoe through the sand, she drew a circle about 10 metres in diameter with the tip of her shoe. Inside were Shirayuki and I– with Jeanne located behind Shirayuki.

「I will agree to fight without leaving this circle. If I put one finger out of it, I lose, OK?」

Shirayuki, stretched her eyebrows in an expression of honest surprise. Meanwhile, Kaname grasped Sonic[27] and raised it to the moon.

「Hail Neue Ange![28] This katana is totally different from your old fashioned weapons. One of these has the battle-power to rival a 'Type 10 Tank'[29]. The best woman and weapon is the latest one. Right, Onii-chan?」

A broad smile spreading across on her face, Kaname turned toward me, but…

In the same moment– perhaps because I had lived with her for so long– I understood her true feelings. It transcended reason, but somehow, her true emotions were transmitted to me. Kaname's actions…

…were nothing more than a bluff.

At this moment… she is completely alone. Neither does she have a *Kamerad*. As if that were not enough, the Baskerville girls are solidifying their positions. Having done her research, she also knows the Ririi Particles levels. Furthermore, their flawless positioning must undoubtedly be a strong pressure.

That small, scared heart has told me everything… And I understand…

So I…

Damn! What else can I do…?

「Aria.」

Even from far away, I could clearly see the veins on her forehead bulging as I spoke.

「The bullets in my 'COCKTAIL' were not 9mm. They were .50AE.」[30]

Taking my Desert Eagle in my hand, I drew it for all to see.

「There's no use trying to stop us, Kinji.」

「Fine. I won't. Do whatever you want. But this type of bullying is the thing I hate the most in this world.」

「It's not bullying. It's 'love'.」

Cupping her hands, Riko shouted.

「There is no difference!」

I snapped back.

「What do you mean to do with that weapon, Tohyama?」

「I am telling you that I will be Kaname's *Kamerad*.」

And as I explained this to Jeanne, who looked as clueless as ever, I glanced over at Kaname…

Clenching a small fist, she laid it across her chest, looking at me with an expression of surprise, but when our eyes met, her cheeks flushed and she immediately turned away.

What kind of reaction is that?

Well, since there are no objections, I guess it doesn't matter.

Shirayuki began to grinding her teeth and just when she was about to say something to Kaname, I spoke forcefully, advancing the duel.

「Alright everyone, let's go over the rules. The duel did not will end until one of the contestants admits defeat. Before that, nothing will be counted as a win. There is no draw. Running away is not allowed. If someone tries to flee, the Loggers may take any action to return them to the Ring.」

This reminds me of my days in ASSAULT. It's not just Aria, but without a doubt, this is how this school operates… That's a bad thing.

「The *Kamerad* exists to prevent the duel from reaching a deadlock, or to prevent the death of one of the contenders. They are authorized to provide assistance to their ally only once. After that, no more interference is permitted.」

「Yeah, yeah… The rules are the same as the ones we know? Anything else?」

Seeing me completely stuck in the role of a Butei, Aria is somewhat happy. She is as blood-thirsty as ever.

「That's it.」

I agreed with a small nod.

「So it's high time we begin, you two.」

Aria said to Kaname and Shirayuki, while drawing her black Government.

Shirayuki and Kaname stared at each other, but neither one made the first move.

In Lumberjack, the start of the duel is decided by the contenders. This is something no one can change and is the exclusive right of both parties.

To begin, they synched their breathing. It was like a battle between two wild beasts, or a close-quarters confrontation between samurai. The only thing that moved in the arena was time, and it passed quietly.

Without a sound, Shirayuki moved her sword and took up her stance.

She placed the blade almost perpendicular and lifted the hilt to her right cheek– that is the stance called Hassou[31]. In modern Kendo matches, it is a stance rarely used. It is a rather old position, but as a Hotogi witch, Shirayuki uses this stance to avoid wasting energy needlessly.

Still, Shirayuki… How will you fight this time?

Kaname's sword can cut through any kind of metal. Even the legendary blade Irokaneayame is probably no exception.

「Razor Sharp[32].」

Kaname whispered, taking up her stance. Drawing her right foot back, she turned to face Shirayuki almost completely sideways. She held her katana horizontally to the ground and raised it to head-level. Grasping the hilt with both hands, she and drew it far back, leaving her flank wide open in a bold stance.

That stance… I've never seen anything like it. You wouldn't find record of it anywhere, but somehow, I understand it intuitively.

It focuses on contacting the opponent's blade, ignoring defence. Completely disregarding it. Taking full advantage of Sonic's enormous cutting power, Kaname can do that. Carrying such a weapon also says something about Kaname's personality.

「…」

Shirayuki wields her katana perpendicularly; Kaname wields hers horizontally. The two girls, who are opposed, even in stance and fighting style, radiate an atmosphere of great tension.

No one said a word. Even the sounds of the insects have stopped.

Their fighting spirits are locked together, as waves of energy began to sweep across the sand. Then…

Appear!

A fallen leaf carried on the wind crossed the space between them, and at that moment, Kaname launched her attack.

Well done.

Choosing the exact moment when the dry leaf blocked Shirayuki's line of sight, Kaname made her first move.

「*Hihomura Kosakabe*[33]」

Unable to recieve the attack directly, Shirayuki withdrew her right hand from the hilt of her katana and swept it across the horizon. Invoked by that motion, a flaming wall, like a folding screen, rose up 2 metres in front of her.

Whoa!

Even where I was standing apart, the intense heat being emitted was at dangerous levels. That is no ordinary flame. It is a raging inferno, burning at a frighteningly high temperature.

'Tonight there are no Ririi particles.'

Now I understand Shirayuki's warning. Without the 'Inhibitory Particles', she can use her full power– she is a human flamethrower.

Despite that, Kaname moved to pierce the flaming wall with her katana, but at the last second, she checked her rush and sprang to the left. Reaching the edge of the wall of fire, she swept Sonic around, and with waving hair, Shirayuki also appeared on the left side.

I remember seeing this position in her fight with Jeanne. Holding her sword in her right hand, she raised her sword overhead like a torch in a one-handed Dai-jodan[34]. Already, swirling flames were enveloping the blade and coiling around it.

「Hotogi Sacred Art, *Hinokagabi Kochou*[35]」

She swung her katana at a speed the eye could not follow. What I could see was only the after-image of the flame, shaped like a flapping butterfly, as the cuts formed 'V' pattern.

Was that a one-handed version of Ganryu's 'Tsubame Gaeshi'[36]*?*

However, she is only trying to scorch Kaname's blade. Shirayuki knows that Irokaneayame shouldn't touch Sonic. If they were to do so, Irokaneayame would certainly be cut.

「…Aha!」

Kaname, assuming sure victory, laughed. Like Shirayuki, the movement of her sword could not be followed with the eye as she moved in to attack.

Kaname gathered her legs into her torso, and somersaulted backward to close distance with Shirayuki. From the blade of her sword a blue fluorescent light shone, leaving a ghostly after-image as it twirled through the air.

「Whoa! That was close.」

「Yeah, she's really going all out, that Kana-mee.」

Carrying on such a conversation, Riko and Aria were commenting as if they had seen, in detail, what had happened in that blur of movement.

「…」

Silently, Shirayuki took up a new position: Seigan[37], and from her crimson hakama…

Flutter!

Part of it had been cut, and now fell. Moreover, there was another cut in the the pure white robes, exposing the Hadajuban[38] she wore beneath.

In the blink of an eye, Kaname had targeted Shirayuki's abdomen, directing two thrusts to her chest. Landing with the grace of a professional gymnast, Kaname said…

「In both attacks, you've saved yourself by the skin of your teeth, Onee-chan.」

Enjoying the moment, Kaname reset her stance with a flourish, but this time, she held the blade away from her cheek, causing her posture to seem somewhat forced.

「Humph… So your plan was to heat Sonic until I could no longer hold it, huh?」

The moment she said that, I finally noticed the blade of her katana was glowing red like a hot iron. If it were me, it would definitely be too hot to hold.

So the flame-spouting Hotogi Arts that Shirayuki was using were not random at all– they were intended to transfer the heat to Kaname's sword. That seem to be the best way to deal with such a troublesome advanced weapon.

「It's a shame. We have conducted ten heat tolerance tests. Both on the katana, as well as myself! Even if the temperature climbs, my performance will not change. Onee-chan, it's over.」

Looking like of a bird of prey about to capture its meal, she drew her right foot through the sand as it grated underfoot.

「It's always best to cauterize an amputation immediately, isn't it. Since even with surgery, they might not be able to re-attach what was lost…? Like an arm or a leg. Well, you asked for it…」

After hearing that terrifying threat from Kaname, Shirayuki took

her sword, returned it to its sheath, and lowered herself into an Iaido[39] stance.

Is that Hihihotogikami[40]? No! That would be the worst thing to do…

Shirayuki…!

Swallowing my saliva, I watched.

Secret Art *Hihihotogikami* is a movement that requires time to gather power, and Kaname will not give her that time. Even if she was able to unleash her attack, it's not hard to imagine what would happen.*Irokaneyame* would be cut as soon as it met Kaname's blade. And Shirayuki is behind it. That can't be her plan. Or… knowing that before hand, did she choose that technique to ensure mutual death and keep her pride as a Hotogi?

Shirayuki…!

「Crimson Fire Witch, burn in your own flames!」

Blade glowing red, Kaname set her stance…

Thud!

Kicking off explosively, she burst forward suddenly like a cannonball at attack speed.

「Kaname, it is already over.」

From between her straight-cut bangs, Shirayuki intently stared at Kaname, and coming up behind Shirayuki…

Jeanne!

Shirayuki's *Kamerad*, Jeanne, moved in. With the Holy Sword Durandal, she took up a stance called "Waki"[41] hiding it behind her body.

「Ooh! That's 'Jet Stream Attack'[42]!」

Riko cheered –using words I didn't understand–, as Jeanne gracefully lept over Shirayuki and brandished Durandal.

「Fleur de Glace d'Orleans[43]」

Having calmly recited the name of her skill, the sword shone with a

blue-white light. Delicate diamond dust sparkled around Jeanne.

Seeing the attack and thinking that it was dangerous to receive directly, Kaname desperately buried her katana in the ground to stop herself, observing that wherever the blue light fell the ground froze instantly. Because of the absence of blue Irokane particles, the super-cooling effect spread to where Kaname's katana was planted in the ground.

「…!」

Crack! *Crack!* *Crack!*

With that sound, Sonic was encased in ice. Kaname's feet weren't frozen to the ground yet, so…

「Haa!」

Boasting superhuman strength and agility, she preformed a handstand. Her sword now caught in the frozen ground, Kaname seized the hilt in one hand and, using it as a fulcrum, swung herself up over her katana– just like a circus performer!

Starting at the sword's point, the silver ice climbed higher, and the blade that had been bright red in the beginning was covered up to the guard by ice before it stopped. Above it, in a one-handed handstand, Kaname remained uninjured.

「*Humph*… You used your *Kamerad*. Sorry, I forgot about the small fry!」

From the handstand, Kaname lowered her body…

Fwip!

「But how unfortunate! It was a futile attack!」

Using her body weight, she pried her katana free, springing forward in the same motion. Soaring over Jeanne, with ice crystals still clinging to Sonic, Kaname's target is… Shirayuki. Kaname is going to swoop down and attack from above.

「From the Style of the Divine Servants[44]… Sacred Art…」

Shirayuki, who until now had been accumulating power, faced Kaname's attack.

「… *Hihihotogikami*!」

Whoosh!

A whirlwind of fire soared into the sky, to meet Kaname mid-air, but regardless, Kaname slashed her way through the raging inferno, and continued her attack– intent on severing Irokaneayame.

「…!」

As if she had realised something, the expression on Kaname's face changed, and in the next moment…

Shatter

With a sound like breaking glass…

Irokaneayame met Sonic, shattering it into pieces. A dull thud followed.

As Kaname fell, Shirayuki extinguished the flames of her previous attack and struck a blow with her katana. That was the sound I heard.

Th-That's the back of the sword…!

Shirayuki gave Kaname a light tap on the torso with the blunt side of her katana.

Kaname fell to the ground, rolling several times before sitting up on all fours and looking up.

「Ah… Wha-…」

Tear-filled eyes opened wide, Kaname moved to gather up the broken fragments of Sonic, but.. once again heated red-hot, her hand drew back instinctively.

「No way… No way… This is Neue Ange… This is completely… wrong!」

Overcome by shock, Kaname is confused… but in my case, I've figured out the trick. More or less…

However advanced the technology, Kaname's katana was still made of metal, and metal, when heated, cooled, heated again–and so on–, becomes very brittle. Even the strongest Japanese steel rails,

undergoing radical temperature shifts, have fractured due to repeated expansion and contraction.

For this reason, after being violently subjected to the extreme temperatures of fire and ice… the effect was immediate. One only has to look in order to see the result.

「Cherry blossoms, that cannot be called anything but fleeting, blossom to scatter away in this miserable world!」[45]

Closing her eyes with their long lashes, Shirayuki recited, as she returned the inscribed blade Irokaneayame to it's red lacquered sheath.

It was from the Shin Kokin Wakashu, an ancient poem by Sanesada Tokudaiji, I believe… Although, coming from someone who always gets bad marks in Classical Literature, this information is unreliable.[46]

「Victory has been decided.」

While twirling her guns and stowing them in her skirt holsters, Aria spoke.

You have this habit of not contributing anything, yet you can still put on that triumphant face.

I knelt next to Kaname…

「Kaname. We've come to the end. The most modern weapons appear one after another, blooming like cherry blossoms. But there is no cherry blossom that isn't scattered by the wind. Your katana was set free tonight– that's all.」

Using the poem Shirayuki had just recited, I tried to comfort Kaname. My meaning was very easily grasped, but because it was so simple, Kaname didn't have to do much guess-work. But the expression in her upturned gaze… is rather that she has yet to accept reality. The newest, most powerful weapon… That cutting-edge blade, has been destroyed. That made Kaname feel as if what happened had called her own existence into question.

「H-…HAAAA!」

And just like a middle-schooler, she lost her temper and tried to punch Shirayuki, who moved into a defensive stance.

Fulfilling my role as *Kamerad*, I raised one hand toward Shirayuki and, hanging my Desert Eagle on my index finger by the trigger guard, let the gun dangle. This is a signal that Butei and American police use that means *'I'm not going to shoot.'*— a gesture of surrender.

After that, I stopped Kaname's with my other arm and signaled with my eyes for her to look down. Where I had pointed was the thing she drawn with her toe at the beginning of the duel, saying:*"…If I leave the circle, then I lose, OK?"*

One of Kaname's feet is outside that circle. Rather, Shirayuki's reversed blow had intentionally pushed her out. And now her leg was sticking out.

「You said it yourself, didn't you? Honour your own rule!」

I had spoken in a kind of harsh tone, so Kaname…

「*Sniff*, *Sniiifff*…」

Her eyes filled with tears, and she tried to contain them, but then…

「W… Wa… WAAAAAAAH!」

And crying just like the middle-schooler she was, she was now sobbing uncontrollably. She can't stand being humiliated in front of me. But…

What can I do! It doesn't look like she plans to stop crying.

「♪He made her cry!♪ ♪He made her cry!♪ ♪I'll tell the teachers!♪」

While saying this, Riko zoomed by and started running in circles around us.

Riko, you hypocrite… Weren't you one of the ones who wanted to 'temper'[47] Kaname?

But… Thanks to such 'help', the atmosphere of bloodlust and battle, has been dispelled. How to say it…?

Riko's face seemed to say: *'That was enough, right? More than this would be bullying, so we should stop.'* It seems that Riko had read the unbearable atmosphere… and purposely started to joke around in order to lighten the mood. As a result the tense atmosphere was disappearing.

That girl has great communication skills.

As for the two of us with meagre social skills… Aria and I could only exchange glances with the expression of '*What can I do?'* writ on our faces, but… Then Haimaki trotted up and licked her cheek, gently comforting her.

Apparently, both Aria's and my own social skills are less than a dog's.

Although, holding by far the lowest ranking in communication skills, was Haimaki's owner, who shouldered her Druganov and was descending from a cherry tree planted near the sports arena.

You were surprisingly close, Reki.

「Kaname, as we crossed swords, I have to say, your technique was impressive. I did not notice your instantaneous counter-attack until just now. If I had moved even slightly, I would have been struck.」

Saying that, Jeanne crouched as she stood next to Kaname, and her back…

Is completely exposed!

Panicking, I turned away quickly.

Remaining completely calm, a large section has been cut– from top to bottom– out of her bulletproof uniform. She is unhurt, but now that girl is showing off her bra strap– white, like her porcelain skin.

B-but… How do they fasten those, I wonder? Girls' bras usually come with clips on the back, so Aria wearing ones with hooks in the front isn't hard to understand, but…

Thinking such thoughts, my brain began to overheat as I pondered this thing that would forever be a mystery to guys everywhere… from somewhere inside her torn Miko clothes, Shirayuki produced safety pins, and rearranged her clothes.

「As I thought, you are very strong– as expected from Kin-chan's little sister.」

Shirayuki told the dejected Kaname, with the expression of a kind and gentle older sister. Kaname, on the brink of tears, silently accepted the title 'Kin-chan's little sister', without a word, nodding

her assent.

Quickly tiring of such a scene, I said:

「Don't encourage her. Whether you are strong or weak in a fight, outside the Island it's meaningless.」

The tension having completely dissipated, I scolded Shirayuki and Jeanne with a wry smile.

Moments later, Miss Control-Freak Aria-sama, told me…

「Kinji, I want coffee.」

If I took too much time, Aria could challenge me to a Lumberjack, so while thinking how unfortunate it was that it was late, I called Mutou to ask for some delivery.

Since I could not say anything about the duel, I said: *'I was out moon-viewing.*[48] *By the way, the girls are here too.'*, to which he replied,*'Give me five minutes!'*, but it seems that there is no coffee to be had. So I asked Aria: *'What do you suggest we do?'*, still using keigo.

「Well, you're useless, aren't you? I worry about your future.」

Questioning whether I was up to the task, Aria contacted her junior from Assault to prepare coffee.

Really, people don't like to be ordered about like slaves, Miss Lazy Noble.

But her *Amica*[49], Mamiya Akari, showed up in Mutou's truck, exactly five minutes later, with ten kinds of coffee, so my lie became reality– We really are having a midnight moon-viewing.

Incidentally, Mamiya is a little shorter than Aria, and also has a flatter chest. It is a rare thing for high-school girls to have such a childish body. Her hair is done up in short twin-tails that make her look like a kid. That girl must have some kind of short in the wiring of her brain, but she has this strange sort of respect for Aria that this little disciple will recklessly obey any order she is given, but…

「Tohyama-sempai, it's very late. What I mean to say is that you have to sit separately from Aria-sempai, rather… move away from all the girls, please.」

With such a remark, she split us up.

Why is she eying me like I'm the enemy? It's not like I try to be left alone with girls.

Come on, Mamiya! Look around at the spot chosen for this 'moon-viewing'. What would a Butei think about this? Monopolising Aria as you sit next to her as you serve coffee with a smile on your face, that burnt smell in the air should at least make you a little suspicious.

「…」

Getting the cold-shoulder from Mamiya, I'm sitting on the ground, far away from the girls.

Would you please give me some coffee? Even if it is twice-brewed. Anyone? Mutou went to go buy some moon-dumplings. I wonder if he'll be back soon…

The girls and Kaname are sitting on the cloth-like weapon,'P-FIBER'[50] that had been suspended in the air and now spread itself out on the ground. Sitting on the edge quietly, Kaname's expression seemed say: *'You can sit on it.'*, so all the girls sat on the substitute 'picnic blanket', and I got the impression that it was a girl's-only sort of gathering.

Concerned about Kaname, I glanced over to where she was gulping a Caramel Macchiato and finally calming down. Maybe because it was so late, Mamiya was sitting, hugging her legs. And having chosen this moment to nod off…

「On second thought, why didn't you use this tonight?」

Aria asked about the P-Fiber that had sealed her fate, and Kaname, after stealing a glance at Shirayuki, replied:

「It was because Shirayuki Onee-chan only fights with a single blade. Unlike the last time, this was a fair duel–not war–, so I thought I should only use a single blade, too. If I used more weapons, then it would be cowardly.」

Ah, that's right. At McDonald's, Kaname said much the same thing.

A few days ago, I said: *'If you want to call yourself a Tohyama, then don't do cowardly things.'* Since that day, she has faithfully kept her

promise.

「Yeah… That's true…」

Hearing that, Shirayuki, who had regarded her as an enemy, re-assessed her opinion. Taking a silver crystal-like fragment of Sonic, she wrapped in a small blanket with a pink flower pattern and handed it to Kaname.

「The katana is the warrior's spirit. Your katana conveyed feelings of a noble soul. It was beautiful.」

「Onee-chan…」

Meekly accepting it, Kaname looked up at Shirayuki with something like admiration. In this setting, they really looked like they were sisters.

「That must be what they mean by 'brotherhood after a battle!'」[51]

Turning around at that line taken straight from a Yakuza movie, carrying a plate of dumplings, Mutou had returned. After handing over the plate to Shirayuki, he came over and plopped himself down next to me and…

「This was a Lumberjack, wasn't it?」

From the beginning, it seems that he had known– Somehow….

「Don't even think about informing on us. Even though it's not technically against the rules, MASTERS has been a little fussy lately.」

「My lips are sealed. For starters, I'm in favour of such things.」

Imparting a hidden meaning to his words that only we would understand, he grabbed a handful of dumplings that the girls had left for us.

「Heh heh heh. Brings back memories, eh Kinji?」

「Don't laugh so strangely!」

「But you are laughing too, aren't you!」

As a matter of fact… Right immediately after I had enrolled in this school, Mutou was the guy who challenged me to a bare-handed

Lumberjack. The reason? If I remember correctly, it had to do with something I had said about Shirayuki, and he picked a fight with me over it.

Underestimating him by only taking into account the physical difference between us, I soon found myself caught up in a tough fight. He had quite a surprising number of various grappling skills, and his specialty *Exployder*[52] had enough power to leave your eyes spinning in your head. It is something that I never want to experience again or it might kill me.

On that occasion, Riko and Shiranui were the 'Ring', and I lost track of how many times they returned us to the ring, and we kept fighting until we both were exhausted and completely battered.

Who was the winner? I've already forgotten.

Then, for some reason, Mutou and I started hanging out. Becoming friends after a fight… Although it doesn't seem to make any sense, this is the extreme way in which we at Butei High build relationships with each other– an obsolete and inefficient method at that.

Having decided to leave the discussion of the duel for another day… Shirayuki, Aria, and the rest each returned to their respective apartments, while Kaname and I went back to my apartment… Back home. Beneath street lights, and while the insects buzzed, we were walking and…

「Onii-chan.」

Kaname broke the silence.

「Yeah?」

「For being my Kamerad…and taking my side… thanks. When you said that you'd be my *Kamerad*… it made me very… happy…」

「But it was my fault that you lost.」

At the very least, I think that I had to point it out.

When Jeanne used *"Ice Flower of Orleans"*, Kaname could have withdrawn her katana and escaped by jumping. But since I was behind her, she decided to halt the freezing effect using her superheated blade at close range. Because of that, Sonic was

completely frozen, compromising its internal structure and making it become brittle.

Although of course, the fact that I was in the way when Jeanne attacked, was Kaname's mistake, but if I hadn't decided to be her *Kamerad*, there might have been a very different outcome.

「It was nothing. Little sisters protect their older brothers… human beings protect their family, since it's the natural thing to do.」

Saying that, Kaname's bangs swayed she shook her head from side to side.

When I heard those words… I felt as if Kaname really was my younger sister.

「…」

I stopped and looked down at Kaname. She also paused at exactly the same moment, looking up at me with those deep sea-blue eyes.

Just like real younger sister would look up at their older brother.

****

1.

1. Normal
2. Aggressive (Aggro)
3. Weak

2. Kanji: 天高く馬肥ゆる秋 (Tentakaku uma koyuru aki)

'High sky and fat horses in autumn.' in kanji. An idiomatic way to describe the fall. It indicates that autumn wonderful time because the sky is clear and blue (high) and because of the good weather, everyone has more appetite and is happy because of the harvest.

3. A phenomenon where bullets are ignited by the residual heat of the gun after firing.

4. 'Kyushin capsule' in the original, a popular naturopathic remedy thought to treat some heart ailments.

5. Butei High is built on an artificial floating island so it is not unlike a huge boat.

6. ‘Kamatoto’ (蒲魚) in the original. A woman who feigns ignorance, naïveté, or purity. Kaname is either saying that Shirayuki is acting helpless on purpose, or that she is not really such pure, reserved girl as she seems to act. Either meaning seems to fit her. *laughs* — Anon-san

7. Interesting factoid: The word here is ‘tsukko’ from which *‘tsukkomi’* is derived. — Anon-san

8. The furingana say ‘revenge’ in katakana, and the kanji say something like ‘battle of retribution’.– Anon-san

9. Polite and formal speaking style typically reserved for speaking with one’s superiors or strangers of unknown rank. Up until now they have been speaking casually.– Anon-san

10. The word here is ‘Kawaigaru’ (可愛がる). Normally it means ‘to be loved’, but in an ironic sense, it can also mean ‘to be teased/ bullied’. Shirayuki is playing off this ironic ambiguity, as Riko will later.– Anon-san

11. The word Kinji uses here is a pun on the name ‘Shirayuki’, which means ‘White Snow’. The word he uses is ‘Kurayuki’ or ‘Black Snow’.– Anon-san

12. The kanji used is (円)”circle” but the shape is not necessarily circular; only such that all possible escape routes are sealed. This fact is more apparent in the original because the next instance give the word in katakana to distinguish it.

13. ‘Comrade’ in German. In WWII in was shouted by German soldiers to surrender. The kanji say: ‘help-assistance person’.

14G. The last part of this phrase especially difficult to render into natural sounding English, and it took about an hour of collaboration for us to even get this far.

In the original, there is a 3 word compound. The first part means: ‘licensed’, ‘legal’, or ‘officially allowed’; the second is Kaname’s name; and the last is Japanese slang that means ‘to beat severely’.

The first part seems to carry an implication that there is some kind of legal immunity being given out. It is *becoming* legal due to some abnormal circumstances. The Kanji for this word literally translate: ‘The Heavens give honorable excuse’ or something like that.

For the last part, I've chosen a British, Aussie, and Kiwi slang term to represent the Japanese, but for the rest of the world, it could be translated 'beat the snot out of', 'FUBAR', or 'beat the living daylights out of'.

So it means that any kind of beating they give Kaname will be within the, and no repercussions can be visited upon the Baskerville girls.– Anon-san and AGlingua

15. A gaming term from Final Fantasy XI. It is a long range attack with quintuple damage, but low accuracy.

16. Arena #2 is the same arena used in the contests described in Volume 3.

17. The actual terms here are 'Shinogi' (鎬) and 'Hi' (樋). Here is a diagram. –Anon-san

18. A scale invented by the German geologist Friedrich Mohs to comparatively measure the hardness of materials. A 10 would be the hardness of diamonds.

19. Mutou coined term. It refers to the fact that, when walking, the girls' mini-skirts expose their gun holsters. It is derived from the Japanese expression 'Panchira' which indicates that a women's panties are showing.

20. The word here is Kamatoto (蒲魚). The same Kaname used earlier to describe Shirayuki. It means a woman who feigns ignorance or innocence.

21. "Takarazuka" in the original, An all female school of acting and performing arts.

22. Burikko (ぶりっ子)　in the original. A girl who act cute and pretends to be helpless to get attention.

23. Okay, Anon-san has set me straight. What is actually going on here has to do with Riko's peculiar manner of speech. She has a habit of stretching out words, so here she is holding out the last sound 'e' in Kaname for longer than usual. So she is giving Kaname a more subtle nickname than those she has given to others.

24. (色仕掛け), literally, 'seduction'. Jeanne's order was given in Volume 10.

25. Ririikane, the blue-green Irokane that has the ability to nullify the powers of other Irokane users.

26. Literally: 'Inhibitory ESP Particles'. 'Stealth' is an Japanese word refering to ESP users. –AGlingua

27."*Single Molecule Vibration Katana*" in kanji.'Sonic' is given as the Katakana reading.

28. This is the Katakana reading. I've read elsewhere that 'Neue Ange' it is meant to be German, meaning 'new arrival'. The Kanji say: 'Cutting-edge Weapons Technology, Banzai!'

29. Type 10 (Hitomaru-shiki Sensha) A high-tech Japanese battle tank currently in service in the JSDF.

30.While was Aria sent a package of Butei Bullets marked 'PASTEL', Kinji was sent one marked 'COCKTAIL'.

31. Hassou stance.

32. It is English written in katakana. The accompanying kanji say something like: "Everything it touches, it severs"

33. 'Blazing Wall of Scarlet Flame' in kanji.

34. Dai-joudan stance

35. Something like: 'Bright Scarlet Butterfly Aid' in kanji.

36. Koujiro Sasaki (Ganryu's real name), was a famous swordsman in Japanese folklore. He invented and perfected the technique 'Tsubame Gaeshi', the 'Swallow Counter' alternatively translated as 'Swallow Reversal'. It is said that it was a technique that struck two cuts with the katana so quickly that it was like a swallow descending, turning, and then flying up again.

37. Chu-dan stance

38. Tunic of thin breathable fabric that is used as underwear when wearing a kimono.

39. Iaido is an artistic style of swordsmanship, that emphasises perfection of form in drawing, striking, then returning the blade to the sheath (saya).

40. 'Scarlet Hotogi God' in kanji.

41. Waki. Another Kendo stance.

42. This is a reference to Mobile Suit Gundam. In that anime, the heroes lined up and conducted a highly powerful, syncronised attack called 'Jet Stream Attack'.

43. "Ice Flower of Orleans" in French and kanji.

44. This was a particularly tricky bit as it is a coined term.

The kanji here read: 'hotogisoutenryuu'.

As some of you may notice, it incorporates the name of the Hotogi in the name. The kanji for 'Hotogi' mean something like 'votaries of celestial'. The last part incorporates the kanji for 'to attend/ entertain'; 'Heaven'; and 'school/style'. So Shirayuki is invoking the lineage of the technique– supposedly wielded by those who attend Heaven/the Gods directly.

By the by, 'Sacred Art' is more accurately translated 'hidden technique' or 'secret teaching'– the most powerful techniques only taught to few who fully master an art/style–, but I left it for the sake of consistency.

So the whole thought here is that this is one of the most powerful techniques from an already impressive art, and it is being invoked by a master of that art.

45. Okay, this is some ancient Japanese poetry. Not being a poet, or particularly well-versed in ancient Japanese, I cannot do any kind of justice to the poem, so here is only a best guess and attempt.

Consulting contemporary Japanese commentary, the main idea seems to be that when things reach their goal of perfection, degeneration sets in almost immediately, so that perfection seldom lasts more than an instant. Some believe that the poem is also drawing an unspoken parallel to the transitory nature of people and their accomplishments.

46. Kinji is correct. It is one of the poems of Tokudaiji Sanesada. No. 141 of Book 2 of the *Shin Kokin Wakashū*. It is a common poem to study in Classical Japanese Literature because it is written in ancient Japanese. Link to the original

47. This was originally a blacksmithing term. It refers specifically to the process of strengthening the metal of a sword during forging by

heating, hammering, and quenching. More modernly, it is used a a term to describe the development of deep discipline and pain tolerance that one would expect a soldier to undergo during intensive training.

48. This refers to the Japanese tradition of ‘Jugoya’, usually held in September, where people view the full moon and celebrate the harvest. It was imported from China, and incorporates special foods and rituals.– Anon-san

49. Lit. “Friend” in Italian: ‘Battle Sister’ in kanji. It the name given to the Senpai-Kouhai sponsorship system at Butei High. When a Senpai takes on an Amica, they are responsible to mentor them, and the junior is expected to show some kind of deference in exchange.

50. Lit. “Ultra-thin Electro-magnetic Propulsion Shield” in kanji.

51. A Japanese proverb. (喧嘩の後の兄弟名乗り) The meaning is obvious, it says that after a fight people can reconcile and be close friends. Literally: ‘Become (in name) siblings after a quarrel’ in kanji.

52. A professional wrestling technique in which the contestant lifts their opponent and throws them to the floor. A type of ‘Suplex Specifically the T-bone suplex — AGlingua

Full Credit and much thanks to the Staff of Twin Dragons Light Novels: **Thunder**, **Darkhellsing**, and **Esteban108**, for permission to use their translation.

Chapter Two.

Chapter 2: Sports Festival–The Brawl

[Begin Text]

Arcanum Duo[1] and Lumberjack, having tasted defeat in both–and in so short a time–, Kaname's malicious attitude has disappeared completely.

She has come to realise that her value was not only as a weapon. Being defeated in the duel has shaken her self-confidence, and it seems that she is now living the life of a normal high school girl.

Unfortunately, there is nothing normal about this school.

Even the many advanced blades she boasted of, have not been seen. This is…

Well, of course it's wonderful.

It's Aria– who will draw her guns in a fight over the television channel–, and Riko– who lays landmines as a prank– that are the problem.

From now on, Kaname should live a peaceful life like any normal civilian. It's something I want for her, from the bottom of my heart. Especially because, at her age, she can still re-adjust to a normal life.

Something in Kaname's attitude towards me has changed, and she has been acting very strange. It appears that– considering her claim that we are sibling–, she has put an appropriate distance between us. She no longer clings to me like Riko, and I consider myself saved from this peril.

But, despite this, I'm still her 'Onii-chan' that needs to be taken care of. Sometimes she does inexplicable things like hiding and watching me– just staring. It seems like the type of situation in the Shoujo manga that Jeanne likes to read:

'I'm in love! But since it's my older brother, I can't show my true feelings…'

And in not wanting to go home, I'm 'immovable as a mountain'[2], but compared to:

'Since you have been with other girls, I'll stab you 30 times with a kitchen knife…'[3]

…that she said a few days ago, this is infinitely better, so I humbly endure it. At least I plan to, but if I'm careless…

On a day that Kaname wasn't home, for some reason I found myself making an inverted Teru-teru Bouzu[4] (The kind with the head down), when I received a strange report by telephone from someone completely unexpected…

「Hello, Master-de gozaru.[5]」

「I told you to stop calling me that.」

It was a call from Hina Fuuma…

「Lately, my Master's younger sister has been actively making friends with all of the first-year girls-de gozaru.」

That was the report I received.

「That's good, isn't it? And normal for girls her age.」

Unlike me, it seems that Kaname was always a popular person. Of course, that was with her 'Innocent Kaname' persona.

「Actually, there is a girl with whom she has recently become especially close-de gozaru.」

「That's good too, right? Who is it-*'de gozaru'*?」

Since everything seemed to be fine, I started losing interest in listening, so I reached out to write the characters: へ の も の へ on the face of my Teru-teru Bouzu[6] with a marker when…

「It is Lady Mamiya Akari-de gozaru.」

Hearing that, my hand froze.

「…Aria's *Amica*?」

「The same.」

I had a bad feeling about this…

Digging further into the matter and asking questions, it seems that among first-years she is one of the most promising students. Although the details are classified, she is also involved in some important affair.

Around the time when E-Ranked Mamiya became Aria's *Amica*— when addressing certain person with an S-rank–, said:

'Working with you is great, but– as an E-Rank Butei– I wonder if it was Fate that brought us together?'

…among other irritating phrases.

And asking what they were doing together…

「The details are unclear, however, it appears they are allied in a conspiracy to keep my Master away from Kanzaki-senpai.」

She answered.

Keep me and Aria…? That would be a wonderful thing!

If I don't stay away from Aria, this pursuit– using her Governments and the horn-like hair ornaments she started wearing at the beginning of the month–, and real-life bull-fight will never end.

This is something that I could only ask for!

「For now, watch both of them. If anything strange happens, report back.」

「As you wish.」

And with this, the call ended. Shaking my head, I dropped heavily on the sofa. In anything related to the first-years, I leave just about everything to Fuuma– maybe too much, but it's fine. I'm very busy… Ok, maybe not so much, but I have to learn how to manage people sooner or later.

Moreover, I can't let myself be distracted by these things. Right now, there is already something much, much more worrying to occupy my brain. Tomorrow, Sunday, at Butei High the Sports Festival (also known as '*La Rissa*' {The Brawl}) will be held– a hellish event.

I'm begging. Let there be a huge storm tomorrow!

And I hung my completed inverted Teru-teru Bouzu on the curtain rod.

****

Sunday morning dawned, without a single cloud on that absolutely beautiful day…

All of us Butei High students are ranged in parallel ranks in Arena No.1. It's for our annual athletic meet– the Sports Festival.

Since students are regularly absent– on investigations or raids– there are no pre-qualifiers. At 5:00 A.M. on the day appointed, we have to assemble, and our 'wonderful teachers', hold us at gunpoint as we rehearse our assigned parts. And then suddenly, the show begins.

Damn, I'm tired! I'm about to fall asleep standing up.

「We, the competitors, swear to respect the laws that govern us as Butei, and to participate fully until the end of the competition!」

And so a bland "Athlete's oath" was delivered by Urara Takachiho– a notable first-year. The student body divided into Red and White Teams, and prepared for the competition. On their hips and backs there was not a single knife, grenade, handgun, rifle, or machine gun. We are all disarmed. This is an extremely unlikely scenario at the Butei High, because school policy states:

'All students must carry a gun and a knife at all times while inside the facility.'

It's time for the first competition to begin– "Shooting Baskets"

Sometimes after a failed match-making, Ranbyou orders the students of ASSAULT:

"Students will compete in groups of two. Each will have to to load their gun, and the slowest one will get shot."

This time, we aren't shooting bullets. We are only throwing balls into small baskets suspended 3 metres above the ground.[7]

And as for the reason that our sports meet is so peaceful…

「Well… All of the students are quite fit, aren't they?」

「Yes, and with this fine weather and cloudless sky, they will be able to work up a healthy sweat!」

The ones having this discussion are from the Metropolitan Board of Education– the Vice-Director of the Tokyo Board of Education and the Chief Supervisor of Educational Guidance are on inspection. That is to say, they came to monitor us.

The reason is that the last Sports Festival hosted Ancient Roman gladiator games, barefoot races, and was jam packed with other extremely dangerous events. Students were injured, one after another, and in short it was a brawling festival.

Despite this, the deranged students at this school thought it was a lot of fun, but rumours of it reached the ears of the Tokyo Metropolitan Governor and he was livid, and surveillance was subsequently instituted. Just one foolish move here could lead to the closure of Butei High! In a frenzy MASTERS issued an urgent statement:

'During the sports festival, and while you are present in Arena No.1, you will play the part of innocent and smiling high school students. Gunfire or any other kind of violent action, will be strictly and severely punished.'

These were their instructions. By *"strictly and severely punished"*, they basically mean a full course of planned punishment, and so we are all 'Shooting Baskets' with strange, forced smiles on our faces.

「Aw, Come on…! It won't go in!」

Even on our White Team … Aya Hiraga of AMDO is participating with a completely natural, innocent smile, offering comfort for our troubled hearts. She usually modifies weapons with her small hands, but the general lack of coordination she is displaying makes me worry about the next order I place with her. Wearing a tracksuit was optional, so Hiraga is wearing shorts. But as she enjoys herself, her resemblance to an elementary school-girl at the park makes her look all the more childish. This kind of competition suits her all too well.

「Umph…!」

Sparkle* *Sparkle

Her silver hair shining and full, lustrous locks flowing uselessly behind her as she throws the ball is… Jeanne. Because she is so beautiful, with her artificial smile she looks like a movie star, but she is wearing bloomers so outdated that they look more like panties. On the whole it is evidence of utter stupidity, and is drawing the embarrassed gaze of the boys nearby.

On the other hand, what is most unsettling is…

The presence of the the senior students–the third-years who are also 'Shooting Baskets'. They receive more requests from governments and private individuals for long-term jobs, and under the guise of a short period of study abroad, they are hired to respond to a lot of incidents around the world. Because of this, they aren't often seen at Butei High.

But even so… No matter who you look at, they all have an awesome presence.

All of them have their own personality quirks– probably two or three–and seem very hard to please.

Also, compared to the other grades, they the ones best pretending to be ordinary high-school students, but their aura is quite different. It's something that can be concealed from an ordinary person, but as fellow Butei, we've notice. As a rule, third-years never shows their full power to a junior student. It is also unwise to show it to other third-years. They are well-used to hiding their claws.

As the number of real-combat job requests increase, the professional rivalry between fellow Butei and the possibility of meeting as enemies also increase. Getting a job also means gaining experience. Because of this, close friendships are ended, and practical experience gained, lethal assassination techniques, and special skills are closely guarded secrets.

As a result, they may seem like regular students on the outside, but on the inside they are more terrifying than the Yakuza. To be more precise, they radiate the aura of a 'professional'.

Slaves in the first year, demons in the second, and Kings of the Underworld in the third…

In short, the King of the Underworld doesn't flaunt their kanabou at mere demons[8].

Uff! I never thought that just shooting baskets would make me sweat so much… Beads of cold sweat ran down my back.

****

Then the traditional part of the Sports Festival wrapped up quickly…

Throughout the school, various kinds of 'Individual competitions' are being held. separately in several of the Butei High sports facilities. It is a clever ploy to impress the Metropolitan BoE bigwigs and ensure additional funding, all without letting the students out of the teachers' supervision.

Because I didn't want to participate in an 'Individual competition', I volunteered to be the head score-keeper, but… as I went to pick up the score-sheets from the MASTERS tent, I was embarrassed to find Ranbyou and Tsuzuri in an altered state. They had changed their normal maniacal 'GAHAHA!' laughter, to the more casual and refined 'hohoho' type, eating sweet bean jelly and sipping green tea with the over-the-hill BoE members. They look just like two beautiful female teachers. This two-faced acting is almost too much.

One day, that pair of 'beautiful teachers' somehow acquired a huge barrel of sake, opened it, and in a drunken rage, destroyed the inner docking clamps for the artificial island, causing the whole of Academy Island to shift 0.8 degrees south….

I wonder if I should snitch on them…

After that, they stabilised the island's pitch using its ballast tanks, but their heads would probably roll if the incident was reported. But in return, *my* head would roll. With that almost 2 meter long zanbato, that Ranbyou usually carries on her back.

****

The 'Individual competitions' are held in the second half of the first part of the Sports Festival, and everyone, regardless of their skill, has been assigned an event by MASTERS. So I don't have the foggiest idea who is participating in what competition.

First, I cycled over to where they were holding an obstacle course…

Tap! *Tap!* *Tap!*

「Ahh…! AHHHH…!」

A girl tried to jump the high jump bar, but her legs tangled. Her head sticking out of the vaulting box and wearing a gym shorts was Shirayuki. The other participants had already reached the goal, and she was the only one that had not made it half-way. What I mean is that she got stuck on every single obstacles–eyes filled with tears of despair. But Shirayuki has always been clumsy.

「Hotogi-san is doing her best!」

「She's the ultimate example of it!」

「Jump higher!」

She was being cheered the guys standing nearby.

Why is that?

I don't get the impression that the are making fun of her, but encouraging her from the bottom of their hearts.

「Umh… Uhh… This… foot? What…? W-wha…!」

Next, to be struggled through was a net, and sure enough she was quickly entangled. Shirayuki serves as the captain of the women's volleyball club and is wearing her uniform.

Your volleyball team, can it even play properly?

For me, this is one of the 7 mysteries of Butei High.

****

Next, I headed to the tennis courts…

「Senpai, please use my towel!」

「No, mine!」

「Mine too!」

「Use mine!」

There was a group of first-year girls engaged in a shoving match, and in the middle of them them I found Jeanne.

「To-Tohyama! Help me!」

While shouting a variation of her usual "*Follow me*", she stretched her hand out of the knot of girls, but…Sorry. I can't rescue you. To enter that circle of girls with very short tennis skirts would be suicide. Surely *'that'* problem would become an issue, so you have to figure something out yourself.

「Isn't is great to be popular? If only you were this popular with boys it'd be perfect.」

Saying that, I diligently recorded the scores from board hung on the fence.

Oh! Jeanne got first place, huh? Second is Takachiho of ASSAULT, and third is Naruse of CVR.

Fwsh! *Fwsh!*

Turning my head at the sound, I saw that they had been having a badminton doubles match on the next court over. In the closest pair, one of the players was… Reki! She wore a polo shirt and Spandex shorts under her skirt–clearly everything was borrowed.

「…」

Whizz!

The shuttlecock flew through the air towards her side, and like a broken pitching-machine, Reki swung her racquet and missed. She swung vertically. Thus, the one-sided game, ended with the defeat of Reki's team. Reki's partner–who seemed to belong to the women's badminton club– collapsed onto the court and began crying.

It's not your fault. Even if Ojizo-sama[8] *helped, and her partner was a badminton world champion, a decent match is impossible.*

「Oi Reki! This is an assignment from MASTERS, no… Show a bit more spirit!」

「…」

While writing down the scores, I scolded Reki a little bit, but she did not respond. Although she is wearing a skirt, she sat against the fence off to the side, hugging her knees and unmoving like a statue.

「…?」

I sensed something a little strange in Reki. By the look in her eyes, she seems to be making a joke of this event– looking like she is running some kind of pre-programmmed simulation in this sham of a sporting event. But… Reki has always been strange, so she can basically do whatever she wants.

****

After that, some girls were being pushed in a hand cart for some kind of unknown event, and I was surprised that the Mutou siblings were taking it very seriously.

「Since it has wheels,the pride of LOGI is at stake!"」

Wearing spandex shorts and mimicking my role as score collector, Kaname joined me. Since it was my job, I entered the area where the last individual competition was being held– the Extreme Sports Competition.

In a vacant area, several curved ramps had been erected here and there. Some were set Standing behind one…

「Unh!」

Hearing a familiar a well-known anime voice, I looked up, and there was Aria, wearing inline skates and doing jumping into the clear blue sky. She was wearing gym shorts, child-sized pads on her knees and elbows, and a helmet with holes carefully drilled for her twin-tails.

Landing on a curved ramp, she spun and continued to make successive jumps, and while still in the air… she came horizontal and spun round and round, twirling like a corkscrew. As her long twin-tails spun around her like a double-helix, cheers soared from the students who were spectators.

Incredible…!

And then on the next jump, she lifted the tips of her skate, twisted her body while turning a somersault, landing a perfect *'Flat Spin 540°'*, successfully preforming several consecutive high-level tricks. And while still in the air, she calmly winked an eye at the younger girls.

Wow… of all the Butei I know, she is the most coordinated.

And after having seen how it is with Reki and Shirayuki, I am more convinced.

Besides… Despite the bad impressions I have of her, right now… because I can't describe it, I can't help but say that… Right now, she looks… very cute. It's quite clear.

From the first day I met Aria, thoughts like that have popped into my head. Her social status is that of a genuine aristocrat, and she also has a talent for learning languages. Why has heavens granted her two or three blessings?[10] Especially since they haven't given me anything. All I got was this annoying physical condition–Hysteria Mode.

But then again… her height, quick-temper, and inability to swim are a few of her flaws.

One of her major flaws, one that is especially notable is her forgetfulness about certain situations where she has overdone something and become angry. In the summer festival, she tried Takoyaki[11] but in the autumn had completely forgotten, and explaining it all a second time was a real hassle.

And recalling such things, my gaze followed Aria until…

Pinch

「Ouch…!」

Kaname, who had just caught up with me, pulled on my cheek.

「What are you watching that has you so fascinated, Onii-chan?」

「I-I'm not fascinated! And why are you so angry? Your cheeks are puffed out like a chipmunk with its mouth stuffed full of food.」

「Nooo reeeeason…」

Humph!

Kaname whirled away and pressing down hard, began copying the results of the BMX Free-style event on the score-sheet.

Crunch

She was pressing so hard, it seemed that her point would break with the force of each stroke.

「Ah, Kinji. Are you… both trying to skip out on the Sports Festival? You siblings are alike.」

Seeming to notice our presence, Aria glided over smoothly, wearing a pair of inline skates, she looked like a pond skater skimming the water's surface.

「Well, the *first part*… it's just a charade, so it's alright to skip, don't you think?」

「Even this acting can be a warm-up for the *second part!*」

「Shh! Don't talk so carelessly about Part Two. If anyone from the MoE hears you, the MASTERS will crush you to a pulp!」

I started scanning the area, but there were no signs of our evil teachers.

「So … Kinji. W-What was 'that' all about?」

Aria asked, turning away as she drank a sports drink from a plastic bottle.

「What was 'what'?」

「You were watching me with a stupid-Kinji look on your face, weren't you?」

「Don't call me that. And wait… You noticed?」

「How could I *not* notice? You were staring at me.You didn't take your eyes off me for a second. 」

「S-Staring…? Ah… well, it's not like I wasn't watching, but… 」

I didn't finish and my answer trailed off as a lump rose into my throat. At that explanation Aria's face turned red. Instinctively, I prepared myself to dodge a hail of bullets, but right now, she is unarmed. I'm safe.

In any case, she doesn't seem particularly angry. Her tense lips have softened somewhat. The look on her face… it's like she's half embarrassed and half happy. I am only able to arrive at these figures because of my previous experiences with Aria.

I was staring at her… so it's not I don't understand the fact that she is embarrassed… but I don't know why she's happy.

So, intrigued, I frowned and Kaname, also scowled. She seems to have understood the meaning behind Aria's expression perfectly, and became angry. Pointing at Aria's face, I was just about to ask Kaname about it when…

「… What are you gong to do now? You're already done collecting scores, right?」

Aria asked.

「Huh? No, not yet. I still need to get the results of one other event.」

「Oh yeah! W h ere!?」

She's in a bad mood.

「Buildering[12]: It's an event a lot like rock climbing, but you have to climb a building instead. It's near SNIPE because it is the tallest building in the school. They're the only ones I haven't marked down yet. On the roof…」

「The r-roof…!」

Ah…!　Damn it!

Aria's camellia coloured eyes became as round as saucers, and seeing this, I hastily covered my mouth., but it was too late. Lately, the word *'roof'* is not one that should be said in front of Aria. And right now, I just said it twice…!

「R-r-ro-roof…!」

「S-sorry, Aria… Forget what I said! I'm so sorry!」

「Ro-ro-r-f-ro-of-oof…!」

Th-This is…

A silver lining! She's 'lagging'!

Whenever time Aria has heard 'that word' she has exhibited a number of reactions, but this one is particularly safe. As it stands now, she'll be out of order for a little while. It is a 'reaction bonus'.

A few days ago–when I didn't know that this forbidden word could cause a disaster–, I irritated Aria by asking:

"Why do you get so angry whenever you hear the word 'roof'? What's wrong with a 'roof'? A 'roof'. What is it? It's a 'roof'!".

After saying it how many times, Aria finally burst into tears, screamed at me in English, so drew her swords and guns, and ended up shooting in all directions while running around the room, and took a swan dive from my apartment into Tokyo Bay. She stole my signature move. That is her most dangerous reaction,'Berserk'.

I had always known that she was strange, but I thought she had finally gone insane… She was floundering on the water's surface, so I rescued her with a fishing rod as she said:

"That time, I don't know why I did it. It was a mistake! So it doesn't count!"

Having fished her out, she summarily began to pummel, but the violent mermaid had finally said it. Apparently Aria talking about what happened that time…

Every time she remembers the kiss that she gave me on the *roof* of SSR, it triggers hysterics. Of course, I don't have a clue why she did it, either. No ideas on how to heal her mental scars (?) immediately leap to my mind.

While Aria getting upset and harassing me about something she did herself is unreasonable, for the time being, by being careful not to say 'that' word, I've managed to get along with her. For now…

「Aria. Hey, are you okay?」

I shook the paralysed Aria and shook her a little.

「I-I'm Fi'm.」

Fully flushed, she was still suffering the effects of mental shock.

「…」

「…」

What are the two of us going to do? From hereon out?

As we shared the silence, and our eyes locked in utter confusion…

Priiii!

Sounding a whistle that was probably used in the competitions, Aria's *Amica*, Mamiya, with her small body and short legs, came running…

But what the hell…?

Her two short twin-tails bristling, she was shaking her fists angrily.

「Tohyama-senpai! Please step away from Aria-senpai! Kaname-chan, give me a hand!」

「Right! That is out![13]」

Taking advantage of the fact that Aria was still wearing her inline skates, Mamiya began took a hold of Aria from behind, turning her around. She was pushing her like she was carting something away on a hand truck. Meanwhile, Kaname cluthed at my waist and started dragging me off toward the SNIPE building.

Oh… So this is the 'alliance to keep me away from Aria' that Fuuma told me about!

But what about us? Putting my physical safety as a priority, I should welcome such a separation from Aria, but…

Why are you two working so hard? Particularly that 'mini-Aria', Mamiya Akari.

Thanks to what I saw Konayuki do about Shirayuki and myself, I understand perfectly because Mamiya sees Aria in the same way. But, looking at it another way, if we prioritize Aria's mental and physical health, couldn't this be dangerous?

But as things stand…to me this is all happening an incomprehensible world, so I can't do anything but let them have their way.

****

Finding out what a terrible *Amica* she had, Aria is probably having a hard time at a place where we wouldn't be allowed to see each other, and I sympathised with her…

I went to the INFORMA tent to deliver the score-sheet results. Here, some first-years were faced with a mountain of forms just like mine, and I noted the current score:

Red Team: 865 points. White Team: 856 points

So, the winner will be decided in the very last event called the "Hundred Runners' Relay".

The "formal" winner, that is…

Heaving a big sigh, I went to Arena #1 where the entire student body had assembled once again; only this time, a 400 metre wide track was left open.

Each team (Red and White) has 50 relay-runners, chosen at random, who had to run the entire track, but…Since I wasn't picked, I'm just a spectator. In the end, the only competition that I participated was "Shooting Baskets", but that's just fine by me.

「Ready!」

Bang!

At the sound of the starting gun, the vast majority of students remained calm, but…

「Eek!」

Only one, a girl from the Red Team on the inside track, tripped and knocked over the backstop. Sweat pouring off her, she fell on her butt as she refused to stand…

It's… Nakasorachi?!

Of all the competitions, she was chosen to participate in the relay-race. That girl has terrible luck.

A second-year attached to CONNECT, Misaki Nakasorachi, with her long bangs hanging down in front of her eyes, she glanced nervously in every direction. Watching the previous runner come around, she fell again, but this time forward. While in that position on all-fours, she realised that her turn was coming…

「Hyaaa!」

Not even taking the time to stand, she entered the track in that position and started crawling on all-fours. Under her shirt, her generous chest, rocked from side to side with each step. Maybe it was divine prank or a trick of Fate, but from my position I could see it clearly…

Her bra was made of raw white and *very* plain. But it's having the opposite effect!

I just hope she isn't thinking about running the whole race on all fours…

Just as we all were beginning to worry about that, somehow Nakasorachi managed to stand up. With legs trembling like a newborn fawn, received the baton from the previous runner and took over.

You've got to be kidding me!

Nakasorachi began to run, but with legs so bent, they seemed to form the letter 'X'.

「Hi, hah, hah, hah… Ho!」

In the end, she managed to run at a speed of about 10 kph, panting hard, but the long red ribbon that was tied on her head barely moved.

That is… Amazing!

Nakasorachi is displaying a unique lack of physical aptitude. She fell down… and again… she has yet fallen. In the 400 metres of track separating her from where she handed the baton off to Watson, she fell a total of eight times.

I've always wondered… It's a real mystery how you can be a proper Butei.

****

As a result, the Sports Festival ended with the upset of the Red Team and their sudden defeat. Needless to say it, Nakasorachi had defeated her own team.

With the applause of all the students, we marked the sham ending of this whole charade…

If only our Sports Festival ended with the First Part, it would be just like a normal high school…

None of the students were particularly tired, but we did some cool-down exercises anyway. We were split into pairs of boys or girls, but I have been paired with Watson who is pretending to be a boy at school…and it was extremely uncomfortable. Watson began to

fluster, caught up in a panic. It got to the point that Shiranui was ‘watching’ us with with concern. I just wanted to disappear.

Meanwhile, from the MASTERS’ tent…

「My.. What a startling last-minute victory!」

「It was, wasn’t it? It was a wonderful sports festival.」

Surrounded by what appeared to be the ‘real’ Ranbyou、 Tsuzuri, and the former actress Ruri Yuuki-sensei from CVR, the Chief Supervisor and Vice-Director of the MoE Committee were in high spirits. But if you look carefully at the desk, the green tea they had been drinking have turned into cans of beer.

When both were a little tipsy, with an angelic smile, Irin Yadokoro from AMBULANCE presented each with a box of expensive cakes, and they left Butei High practically walking on air, however…

Damn it…! Bureaucrats!

Butei have always used the same old trick when dealing with spineless characters– beautiful women, alcohol, bribes… and they are left completely fooled. Even a pacifist like me pities them.

Being a sports festival with the name *‘The Rissa’*, which in Italian means ‘The Brawl’, I should realize that there hasn’t been a *‘Kibasen’*[14]!

‘Kibasen’…

Just the word is enough to bring back memories, and cause my stomach hurt. It’s one of the competitions that will take place in the ‘far from normal’ Part Two of the Sports Festival.

****

While taking a pill for my stomach[15]in the open water fountain…

「Tooyama[16].」

Carrying a red safety cone in her arms, Watson approached.

「If this is for your ‘rehabilitation’ I won’t do it. Just think about the time and place. If Shiranui sees us again…」

「But I haven’t said anything! We’ll save rehabilitation for next

time. Rather, a while ago… using the cool-down exercises as an excuse, you took advantage of the opportunity to touch me in strange places, didn't you? On my.. h-here… and here… 」

「 Don't get so worked up over nothing! Who would want to touch you there, anyway! 」

「 The way you say it is *so* rude! 」

「 You're a pain, seriously… 」

As we talked, Watson signaled the message '3' by blinking, so we are now pretending to help collect the last of the equipment used in the competitions. With these things in hand, the two of us left for the gym storage warehouse while taking extreme care that no one saw us.

「 Well, what happened? Have you found Third–G-3? 」

Inside the dark warehouse, poles and urethane mats for the high jump had been piled up and we sat down.

「 Nothing yet. Even our own British Security Service, MI5, has been unable to locate him. G-3 is an expert at 'disappearance' and that includes concealing his movements, communications, and all all of his footprints, and of course not being detected by any visual surveillance. 」

「 Oh, right… I've seen him do that twice. So that's how it is, huh? 」

So he can't be tracked…huh?

「 But what he cannot hide is his past. Look at this. 」

From behind her back Watson, extracted several sheets of A4 paper and handed them to me.

Watson, did you put these there before the festival started, and have they been there ever since? I thought that I felt something crinkling when we did back-to-back stretches just a minute ago.

「 I can't read it. It's written in English. 」

I said, thrusting the lightly cinnamon scented paper back.

「 You should study more, Tooyama. 」

With a feminine sigh Watson…

Plop!

…sat her anything but masculine, round buttocks down next to me.

Ugh…

Damn! My stupid sense of smell has been activated. Maybe because she's sweated a bit in the Sports Festival, but… Watson exudes a faint scent. I can sense her female pheromones, even though she is dressed as a boy.

Hey, Watson! How is it that despite giving off this sweet, feminine scent, you haven't been outed as a girl?

Your thighs are practically exposed in those shorts, and I'm not sure if I'd call words 'healthy' or 'seductive'.

「Tooyama, why are you looking at my legs? You're positively indecent!」

Speaking of 'indecent', Watson blew a raspberry at me while turning the page.

「I-I'm not looking! Who would want to!」

「You are so rude.」

After exchanging the same troublesome banter again…Watson put on a serious expression and stared at me with eyes, that if you look closely, are also quite feminine.

「These documents contain the information that you wanted Liberty Mason to hand over, and as members of DEEN, we want to ask the leader of Team Baskerville…you, what we should do if we encounter G-3… In other words, we want to hear your opinion.」

「My two cents aren't even worth that much. What do the documents say?」

「Well, first they say that *'G-3 is not a criminal*'–at least not according to the British Government.」

「What…? Not… a criminal? He used Kaname to attack Aria and the girls. What is he then?」

「If seen from your individual point-of-view, he looks like a criminal, doesn't he? But when viewed as a whole, he can also be seen as a good person.」

「…?」

Seeing my blank look of confusion, Watson indicated a certain part of the paper.

「Take this here for example. After his escape from Los Alamos, G-3 began to destroy terrorist groups, pirates, human traffickers, and other dangerous armed groups around the world, saving innocent people. However, he never took a penny in exchange. Naturally, believing that there was something underhanded about it, but after investigators made an exhaustive search, they came up with nothing. We conclude that the most prominent factor in all of his armed raids was that they were all done for 'free charity'.」

「That kind of charity is dangerous!」

Saying that, I crossed my arms.

Although it doesn't match your ill-mannered appearance, G-3… with your clichéd speaking style, are trying to be a 'champion of justice'? But if that's the case, why did you attack us? Or is it perhaps that myself, Aria, Shirayuki, Riko, and Reki are an 'dangerous armed group' to him? Although, when I think about the Baskerville girls aggressive personalities, I can't fully deny it. It's sad, really…

「That type of mysterious phantom has been around for ever. By use of armed force,they will self-righteously save the powerless–in most cases,disregarding the law.」

I had said, and as for my thoughts… The idea of American comic book heroes and Period Drama Samurai had come to mind. Following that analogy, *there was one person in particular* that sprang to mind… but I was had just shaken my head to dismiss the idea, when…

「Your sister also uses this M.O., right?」

Watson said bluntly.

My sister… Who actually is my older brother, but… yes, Kana does work similarly. In her actions as a Butei, she hasn't accepted a

penny from poor people. But really, that's not something to be commended. Doing things like that negatively impacted fair payment, prices, and things like vested interest in the industry as a whole.

When she has done this too much, there have also been complaints brought before the Butei Council, but Kana just blew them off. She just says, *"Well, just give me an onigiri as a reward.",* and she really has saved the relatives of poor family members from entrenched criminals for a single onigiri.

「G-3 and Kana, in spite of greatly differing personalities, both act like mysterious phantoms. You seem to respect and admire Kana lot, so that may be the reason why you don't want to admit it.」

…Watson continued.

「G-3 and Kana, in spite of greatly differing personalities, both act like mysterious phantoms. You seem to respect and admire Kana lot, so maybe that's the reason why you don't want to admit it.」

…Watson continued.

Although I couldn't say it, I partially agree. I've been vaguely aware of it from the beginning. Although it is scattered, G-3, Kaname, Kana…. and finally I, all share a partial similarities in our personalities.

「When G-3's target and the US or England's national interest align, it seems that they put out a job request offering payment in weapons, equipment maintenance, and other kinds of sponsorship rewards. *'You can't put chains on a wild beast, but the helpful animal will be fed.'* as the saying goes. It could also be said that they derive their morality of their actions from the hidden agendas of major world powers. Well then, after those arguments… What do you think about G-3, is he good or bad?」

Having heard the facts from Watson, and taking a few moments to consider…

「My opinion is simple…」

It was very simple and easy to express.

「Things like good and bad are dependent on time and circumstance. It's like when two people are fighting. Which one of

them is right? The answer is different, depending on which side you are looking from. This is something that even middle-school students can understand.」

「Does that mean that you see him as neither good nor bad?」

「Exactly, however… he is an outlaw.」

Now that I had spoken clearly, Watson stared earnestly into my eyes.

「If he appears in Japan again and breaks the law, we will arrest him. That is all. That is a Butei's job, after all.」

Hearing what I just said, Watson nodded agreement.

「And what about Far East Warfare?」

Now that you mention it, I didn't answer that part of it, but my mind was already made up a long time ago.

「Tamamo said, *"We have to find a way to win G-3 over into DEEN"*. It's not that I don't know which strategy we should take, but it depends on how negotiations go… if he agrees to talks, and accepts our terms.」

「And if he doesn't…」

「We would have no choice but to respond with violence as well. Although the Cao Cao sisters and Aria think that I'm a lazy, peaceful idiot, this amateur negotiator has a limit, and the Japanese brain is not a flower garden.」

Just as I finished saying those acid words…

Clatter!

「You can't win, Onii-chan…」

Surprised, Watson and I turned toward what had been knocked over, and from inside the vaulting box that had saved Aria's and my lives back in April…

「Ka-Kaname!?」

Suddenly she appeared, rather, she had always been there. She came to a resolution after hearing our unpleasant conversation.

Her mouth gaping, Watson hid in my shadow, while hoping to go unnoticed… Wearing Lycra shorts, Kaname sat down on the vaulting box.

「Third is very strong. He's a complete a Genion. He's no longer human.」

Since she had heard the entire conversation, it can't be helped… and Kaname's eyes were earnest. That being the case, I turned my attention to Kaname for the moment.

「G-3…He's a failed prototypes, isn't he? We were able to find that out much. Besides, if he isn't human, what is he?」

「He's a superhuman.」

Creak!

Kaname said, as the vaulting box made a noise.

「He's not an enemy that you can fight and win– even with HSS or ESP. And… fighting against someone who is stronger than yourself is extremely illogical, Onii-chan.」

I've hear such threatening words from Kaname countless times every day until now, but… because of what happened at Shinagawa, I can't laugh it off… He's strong. Very strong. I could feel it. A Butei that can't gauge his and his opponent's respective fighting power doesn't lead a long life.

「Onii-chan, don't fight Third. He is very strong and his cause is just. He has two wishes… and I want to support both.」

「He has… two wishes?」

Her eyes took on the colour of the deep-sea, as if something sad had suddenly drifted by. My question had touched a nerve.

「The first: keep the teachings of Professor Sara who was in charge of our training– Fight to save the weak from the bad men who oppress them. By a display of greater strength, he will become a deterrent to conflict. He believes in this *raison d'être* for a "Universal Soldier"[3a].」

「But, isn't he is the person that might kill you?」

「If you were close to him, you'd understand. Besides that, I don't

want to weigh him down. So, it's fine if I am sacrificed–If it is for Third and Professor Sara's ideals. That was what I swore when I started following him.」

Saying that, Kaname's voice was full of fierce loyalty. This is… a very bad thing. It's at a level where she doesn't cherish her own life, and such loyalty is not something that can be easily dissolved. Being willing to give up her life… she won't even flinch from death. That kind of loyalty is more like a religious faith.

「Moreover, since the escape from Los Alamos, he has saved my life countless times. All of his followers are ready to die for him.」

Kaname said while placing her hand on her chest…

「Do you love him?」

Watson, who had been silent, asked Kaname a question that only another girl could ask, but Kaname shook her head…

「It's not that kind of relationship. Besides… G-3 only loves one woman.」

「Who is this woman?」

If an enemy has a 'significant other', that's something we can use… So, following the natural reflex of a Butei, Watson started asking questions.
「I just told you– the one in charge of our education, Professor Sara. When Third was 14, she transferred from the Harvard School of Medicine, and the only… she was the only person at the research station who showed him any kindness. She believed that Genions could be a deterrent to conflict.」

Saying this, Kaname pulled out her brand new Butei Handbook and took a photograph from inside. In it a Caucasian woman wearing a white lab coat and a gentle smile appeared. If a painter saw her, he could only fail to capture her beauty in a painting. She seemed to be a woman about 20 years old, but her eyes reflected the purity of a girl. Kaname, having met her personally, was absently staring at the photograph.

Saying this, Kaname pulled out her brand new Butei Handbook and took a photograph from inside. In it a Caucasian woman wearing a white lab coat and a gentle smile appeared. If a painter saw her, he could only fail to capture her beauty in a painting. She seemed to

be a woman about 20 years old, but her eyes reflected the purity of a girl. Kaname, having met her personally, was absently staring at the photograph.

「Where is she now? Is it possible that she is still at Los Alamos?」

Watson asked, probing.

「She… is no longer in this world…」

Kaname answerded.

「One day, something happened during Third's training, and she died in the research laboratory. He thought that he was responsible… and from then on, he was like another person. The escape from Los Alamos occurred the very next month.」

Hearing that… Watson's face flushed in deep embarrassment.

「I'm sorry. Accept my apologies. About you private affairs… I think I pried more than I should have.」

Even though she had answered the questions that Watson asked… I think that Kaname also told us these other things, wanting us to understand G-3's actions. So that we could avoid a conflict.

「You said that G-3 has two wishes. What's the second?」

Right now, Kaname is willing to talk to us a little about him. I think this is my change to ask some questions…. The answer I got was not merely 'important', but 'vital' to the matter at hand.

「Obtain the power of Irokane.」

Irokane! The same metal that Sherlock Holmes was investigating at IU?

Borrowing Sherlock's words… *'It bestows upon the holder a mysterious power that makes all other ESP powers look like child's play…'*

So that's what you were looking for, G-3.

「Once I asked Third about the effects of Irokane… You know that he's really done his homework, right? But one ceases to function normally. That used to scare, but… ever since I've met you Onii-chan, I can understood it perfectly.」

「Since… you met me?」

「For people in love… those feeling are absolute, and because it is a just cause… I want to help Third. I want to give him *Irokane*. For the love he felt.」

Kaname gave a that slightly baffling remark.

「So Onii-chan, don't fight Third. He is strong…his cause is just. Fighting him is completely illogical. You understand…? Right?」

Kaname delivered that last line with a quavering voice…

She has sworn loyalty to G-3, and that seems to be the reason why she pities him. She doesn't want G-3…and me– the Onii-chan she idolises– to fight. Right now, I think the wants that with all her heart.

G-3…

What do you plan to do with Irokane?

So the reason we were attacked is also related to that. It is also within Aria's body, but not even surgery could extract it because it is too close to her heart. So it's regrettable for Kaname but… he's definitely someone that I don't seem to be able to along with.

「Humans are 'completely illogical', Kaname. I don't want to face a superhuman, but, depending upon his actions, I could have no choice but to fight him–regardless of the outcome.」

I left the possibility for confrontation open in my response…

…!

The tension in the gym storage shed suddenly rose .

「So that's how it is…」

Kaname muttered with her head down, then shot Watson a pointed glare.

「What are you going to do, Kaname?」

「If that's the case, then a small, unfortunate accident may occur, Onii-chan. First, I'll incapacitate Watson so you can't enter Hysteria Mode. As for you, Onii-chan, I'll break your arms and legs so that you can't fight, but don't worry, Onii-chan. I'll take good care of you and nurse you back to health.」

Wearing sneakers and standing on the warehouse floor… Kaname curled the fingers of both her hands into claws.

「…」

She was going to shred Watson with her bare hands.was unarmed. Watson… meeting Kaname's gaze, made a decision. From her mouth…

Ping!

Hearing the noise and looking back a small folding knife with a blade of less than two centimetres fell onto the mats and gripping it in her fingers, Watson prepared to fight.

「H-Hey… hold it!」

Glaring sharply, I tried to check Watson.

Somehow, she had managed to hide a sharp object all day, despite today's restrictions that made it a violation of school regulations.

Where did he keep it? The handle is wet…

Probably inside her mouth. As expected from the "Full-body Weapon"– the Western Ninja.

「I don't want to do this. G-Fourth… Kaname Tooyama, you're a key strategic figure in DEEN. I don't want to hurt you. But everything has an order of precedence. In this situation, my own personal safety takes priority over yours!」

The moment she handed down this logical conclusion, Watson also implied that I should fight too. While the tow of them were staring each other down …

I reached into my pocket and readied the secret anti-Kaname weapon that I carry for situations like this. Just then, with almost providential timing, we heard the campus' Public Address system.

「This is a message for all students. Please prepare immediately for 'phase 0-2'[17]」

I was unable to picture her earlier ignominy… Nakasorachi's voice was beautiful. Seizing the opportunity…

「That is enough! We don't have to settle this here and now. Look.

We have to get back to the Sports Festival. That's our top priority. If we are late, Ranbyou will beat the hell out of us so badly that we'll be in no condition to fight.」

I said this, trying to smooth things over. Watson hid his knife in his mouth again, muttering: *"But…"*; and when Kaname opened her mouth to say *"But…"*, I tossed the secret weapon, or rather, the caramel candy into her mouth with a plop.

「Ommmii-chmamm, mmhmmh…」

Kaname replied, while she began munching on the sweet… It seems that the caramel candy has suddenly become more important than the fight. For some reason, she has an abnormal love for caramel.

With a tired sigh, I grabbed Kaname–who now had a placid expression on her face–by both shoulders, and steered here away… I had managed to separated them, and we crowded out of the gym storage shed.

Thank goodness…

That was close, but somehow, I managed to get out of it– alive and without a scratch. The use of such a technique has proven effective on occasions that Aria has been chasing me, and I've used her peach buns as a decoys and escaped. For teaching me the importance of applying human experience practically, I owe you a small debt of gratitude, Aria.

****

The second part of the sports festival, began at 5:00 pm. This is a way to turn the tables on the MoE, because government employees don't work after 5.00 P.M. After the VIPs had gone home, the second part could really begin.

To stop the student complaints that were piling regarding the supervised athletics, several events were organised to get them fired up and allow them blow off some steam: the boys' competition, '*Sabage* with real bullets'[18] and the girls': 'Water-*Kibasen*'[19]— event names that make me want to cry.

As in Part One, both competitions will go on without changing the grouping of Red and White teams. The Team that wins each competition receives ten thousand points.

What exactly was the point of the half-assed kind of scoring I recorded a little while ago?

「All boys participating in *Sabage* with real bullets, report to your designated starting locations, please.」

I know it's not Nakasorachi's fault, but I really hate announcers.

In the boy's competition, '*Sabage* with real bullets', the name says it all. is a free-for-all battle that's practically a war. Unlike those games played with airguns, no matter how many times you get shot because of our bullet-proof school uniforms, you can keep fighting. Only when a participant's back touches the floor are they disqualified. The idea being that the supplementary use of martial arts will allow you to to disqualify your opponents faster, and the event quickly becomes close quarters combat fest.

In the first part there were bare-handed fights, Aru-Kata[20] matches, and other kinds of tournaments held through the school, but in the secret second part, they were all rolled into one event.

「Likewise, all girls participating in the Water-*Kibasen*, report to your designated pool, please.」

The girl's competition, Water-*Kibasen* underwent a similar violent fusion.

At first, Kibasen was a Butei High competition where punching or kicking, as well as the choice of any weapon, was allowed. The reason why monitoring of the sports festival had been instituted, was because this competition turned out so many injured students.

The Sports Festival also used to include winter swimming tournaments, but this was also banned, arguing that it was a form of child abuse.

The result of the combination of these two banned competitions was no less than Water-*Kibasen*. In this competition, girls in swimsuits combine in a pool to form a 'cavalry unit' while madly scrambling to collect their opponents headbands. Even imagining such an event is dangerous for me…

And I, of all people, have orders from MASTERS to be a 'Second'.

As you would naturally expect, even in Butei High, boys and girls' swimming classes are held separately however… in Water-*Kibasen*,

each team must have a Second, and there is a rule that allows them to conscript someone to be their strategist.

Because of that, the Baskerville girls were all asking me, *"You'll be our Second, right?"*.

「Kinji, do you have a fever or something? There isn't a single girl in ASSAULT that doesn't want to fight.」

「If Kin-chan is our strategist, then I'll be able to participate and maybe show off my good points…」

「No, no, no !!! I want to play, play, plaaaaay! Riko really loves this kind thing!」

「Everyone else if going to fight, so I will fight too.」

They're all blood-thirsty, and no one was willing to resign.

I wonder what would happen if I called MASTERS, probably something like this…

「What a stupid thing to call for! If that's case, then just do it!」

Ranbyou, would just give me a direct order like that.

Best case scenario, I'd be sent to the 'Sabage with real bullets'…

At least there I could have asked Shiranui to hit me gently, losing on purpose and being able to retire quickly.

Since I could not use the girl's locker room for obvious reasons, I changed into my bathing suit in a storage closet next door… The first and second-years' Water-*Kibasen* would take place together in the huge pool, and as I timidly made my way to the poolside I heard…

「Wah, The Womanizer came just like the rumors said.」

「Watson's alright, but this Womanizer is disgusting.」

「A new page on the exploits of the Womanizer!」

A group of second-year girls in swimwear, glared at me as if they were looking at a pest.

Damn it… It's not as if I like being here!

Ugh…

In the vast area off to the side of the pool, and as far the eye could see, there were girls, girls everywhere. And besides that, all of them were wearing one or two swimsuits. They weren't really too far from being completely naked. It was like being in a beautiful flower garden. But for someone like me who is allergic to such 'flowers', it already has we wanting to run, so I'm cowering with my back against the wall. futilely trying to keep as far away from them as possible.

In order to not hyster-ise[21] I needed to stimulate some other sense… Preparing for just this kind of emergency, a few days ago I memorized the menu of a Chinese restaurant, "The New Fortress" where Fuuma works, and I recited it from memory.

(…Bái tāngmiàn, Málà miàn, Mántou…)[22]

Argh … How I would really love a pillbox where I could hide…

「Alright, you lot! Start warming-up!」

Wearing a competition swimsuit for the competition, Ranbyou held a whistle in her mouth…

Forming up in front of the pool, or, in other words, with their back to me, all of the girls…

「Bend forward!」

Prrii! *Prrii!* *Prrii!*

What kind of dangerous position are you putting yourselves into… and all at once?

And just when I had reached the Qīngjiāo Rou sī![23] , I was getting too excited!

Thanks to the spectacle before my eyes, I lost focus, so, clenching my teeth, I had to start over again from the 'P' in Pídàn[24].

「Emh … Are you okay, Tooyama? Why are you making that angry demon face and muttering? There's a strange sweat covering your body.」

「Táo bāo, Mángguǒ bùdīng, Watson!?[25]」

I asked Watson, who passed by chance, wearing a sweatshirt… I grabbed her to stop her from leaving, placing her as a barrier between my field of vision and the girls as they did their warm ups. Just a few minutes ago, she had done something similar with Kaname, hiding behind me, so I took this opportunity to have her return the favor.

Watson is a transfer student… who transferred to study ar Buitei High to study, is pretending to be a boy–an exchange student with a secret. She has an obvious reason, more critical than mine, to avoid participating in Water-*Kibasen*, but because of arrangements he made with MASTERS, right now, her job is to provide First-aid, so that saved her from having to wear a swimsuit.

「That great, stand right there for a moment… Stay close to me」

「What? Ah… Oh.. OK, I get it, Tooyama…」

Bending my legs and stooping slightly forward to match his height, I laid my forehead Watson's back, protecting me from the compromising Achilles tendon stretch the girls preformed with splayed legs.

Completely unlike me– whom they treat with contempt–, Watson is very popular among the girls. I have no idea why they treat such a dashing "guy" differently than me. Could it be that appearance defines a person? Still, as time passes, all of the girls show their disdain for me. At last, it seems they have finished their warm-ups, so… Slowly, I peered around the side of Watson's waist and looked toward the rest area beside the pool.

「…」

A-All right. It looks like they are now only standing normally. That's not good either, but… it seems that I have successfully escaped this dangerous situation, where all the girls flex their bodies, showing off all sorts of startling poses.

But in this situation it is impossible to know when an accident may occur.

And so, trying to mentally prepare myself for whatever might happen…

「Tohyama-kun, in Water-*Kibasen* no live ammunition is used, but firearms are allowed, so you can use this.」

INQUESTIA division, the investigative division of Butei High, the licensed professor, Takamagahara-sense, handed me the object she was carrying. That thing is…

It's a Ballistic Shield[26], one commonly used by Japanese SAT groups[27].

「Oh! Thank you very much!」

The spirit of Butei High seizing me, I deftly took the excessively heavy shield, and carried it toward the rest area of the pool, dropped it on the ground making a loud noise, and kneeling on one knee, nimbly hid my body behind it.

Right then, she was an angel![28]

It's a good thing I learned the proper use of such a shield in ASSAULT. With this, as long as I remain in this position, it is possible to completely limit my field of vision. I only have to look out the view slit towards the pool when necessary. From now on, hidden behind it, I am like a turtle in its shell.

At that moment, it occurred to me to try looking out the window..

「If a girl's swimsuit slipped, you'd be embarrassed, right? Just make sure to return the shield to AMDO.」

On the other side of the shield Takamagahara-sensei looked through the view slit and winked. The act of straightening her back and turning to the right…

Due to their large mass, her chest that seemed ready to escape her flowered bikini, lagged behind her movement by approximately 0.5 seconds as she rotated, and I saw her not only large, but round hips at point-blank range…

Ba-dump!

The rush of blood flow reached dangerous levels.

Hey, Kinji! Get a grip! I know you're a little weak with older women, but going into Hysteria Mode would be no joke. Rather, Sensei… I thought you were an angel when you were actually a demon! Your clothes make you look like the slender type, I had no idea….

****

Putting aside my flustered state, there was time set aside for pre-game strategy meetings by the pool…

The girls began to gather and discuss the formation of the ‘horses’, and ‘rider’. Each cavalry unit[29] consists of members of an official Team[30] or club, but because there are only four Baskerville girls are four they are just enough to form a unit. Those four… found me still behind my bullet-proof shield…

Oh…!

Through the shield’s window I spotted Aria, and for some unknown reason, seeing her wearing that bikini, caused my blood pressure to rise instantly.

I deliberately tried to reduce my field of vision by squinting my eyelids but…

「You look like a pervert. You’ve had an weird look on your face ever since we started, so stop it.」

Slightly flustered, Aria, hand on her hip, had forbidden me from even doing that. But thanks to that, I was able to admire her nice, small figure without having to hide it.

She came dressed in two piece bikini, decorated with a narrow strip of lace hanging from the top and another wrapped around her waist. It was a light camellia colour, rather the fabric itself was so light– so thin–, it seemed transparent in certain places, leaving little to the imagination. A show as wonderful as it was terrifying.

「I’ll open a wind-hole in you if stare! You are also forbidden to open your eyes!」

So what exactly am I allowed to do?

Rather… Why are in such a bad mood, Aria? Is it because you don’t know how to swim?

Bang!

Because of her bare-footed soccer kick,now before me on the other side of my shield…

「 Kin-chan, I-I'm a little embarrassed to do this but…since it's for Kin-chan, I resolved to wear it! 」

Witha jerk, the window now turned to completely face Shirayuki…

Whaaaa!

Bent over, my eyes almost popped out of their sockets, to see what I thought at that moment was her fully nude body, but that was because bikini she wore covered the bare minimum area. It was one of those so-called micro-bikinis. In Butei High, choice of swimwear is elective, but there's been some kind of mistake if you think bikini is *'for me'*. It's the exact opposite!

As I stood there quivering and stunned…

「What do you think, Kin-chan-sama? Do you like it….? Or maybe it's indecent? Do you hate it? Yes, You hate it! I-I'll change right away! 」

And that said, she started pulling at her bikini straps, Shirayuki started drawing closer to my shield window.

「It's fine! It's fine! Quit bowing! 」

Changing the position of my shield, I proceeded to seek emergency shelter in the other direction…but the shelter did not prove to be a safe place either. Now I was facing Riko.

「That's not right, is it? Ki-kun is into more exciting things, aren't you? Check out this classic school swimsuit!. 」

Posing in front of the shield while smiling playfully, was Riko… As expected of her, she is wearing an out-dated swimsuit, you can only find in certain types of games.

In short, it was a navy blue one-piece. As the the fabric covered a larger area, leaving comparatively less skin exposed, at a glance it was a safe design for me.

On her chest, she had stitched a rectangle of white cloth with, ‘2-A Mine Riko’, written in hiragana[31]…. and bellow her navel… what’s that? A mechanism to release water accumulating in the swimsuit, I guess? The swimsuit had an opening just large enough for a hand to

slide up under, constructed like a very short skirt. Those thoughts being sightly erotic, I tried not to think about it.

「My, my… noticed the water release, did you? You're a real gentleman, aren't you?.」

Riko said, as she pulled on the flap to expose her navel.

「H-h-hey… wait, don't do that!」

「Hmm?」

Seeing me so nervous, Riko tugged more. Taking a peek at the top made caused Aria flush red, but it was connected to the bottom of her swimsuit and she started pulling it open…

「Hold it right there!」

I can't retreat, so instead I moved forward and…

Bam!

With a push from my shield, Riko tumbled backwards splaying her long legs.

Serves you right!

Dragging my shield back and away from Riko, now entering my field of vision was…

「…」

Giving me a cold glare that said ‘idiots will be idiots’, Reki appeared wearing a swimsuit. She also wore a bikini that was almost the same shade–between blue and green–as her hair.

Reki’s figure was in greater proportion than Aria and in lesser proportion than Riko… but it still had the attraction of a real girl.

For instance–although I would never do something like this of my own accord– if I got the public pool with Riko or Shirayuki, all of the guys would think: *'She's out of his league'* , and I'd be thrown out with a *Thunk*. If their truly horrible personalities were ever exposed, howecer, they would not be nearly as popular as their appearances would suggest. And if I went with Aria, I'd be afraid that someone would report me to the police, saying: *'There is a suspicious person in pool showing an elementary student around'*.

「…」

None of that would happen with Reki…

For some reason, I wouldn't feel strange taking a girl like her to the pool. She looks like she could be my age, or maybe a year younger– a regular girl. While pondering it, I began to fantasize about what it would it be like if the two of us went to the pool, when…

「Wha-Wha-What, Kinji? Now it's Reki? You're practically ogling!」

Bam!

Going around the the side to get behind my shield, Aria kicked me in the butt.

「N-no! I just thought that, looking at her, she looks normal, so… 」

「Oooooh Really…! Like…! a…! Normal…! girl…! You…! sure…! took…! your…! sweet time…! Comparing…! 」

Suddenly exploding for some reason, Aria delivered a kick at each, so I turned to put the shield between us.

Aren't you underestimating it a little? This shield is 'Made in Japan'.

Its ballistic protection level is NIJ-III＋[32], it's imitation platinum can even repel rifle fire, making it is one of the most impenetrable shields in the world.

「Stupid Kinji…! likes…! *normal*…! girls…!」

Bam! *Whap!* *Thud!* *Boom!*

W-wait… Seriously? I-it is bending! My NIJ-III＋ shield is impenetrable! The bulletproof shield, is actually being dented by kicks. How exaggerated is this superhuman kicking power?

「I'm not saying that! I know that she's not normal at all– a mysterious, pseudo-assassin sniper girl that keeps a pet wolf.」

I had not finished speaking, when I received another kick in the butt…

…Reki, had kicked me in the butt too.

Is this what they call bullying? Can I cry?

In the end, time ran out and our supposed tactical meeting played out like a group comedy routine. Still wondering why in the world they asked me be their Second…

「Do your best! Don't kill anyone.」

Giving this stupid tactical directive, I watched Sir Aria mount her steed 'Shira-Ri-Re', and saw them off. Taking advantage of the fact that Aria was lightest– and the only one of the four who cannot swim–, she was 'mounted' on top while Shirayuki, Riko and Reki formed the 'horse'.

I'll explain…

This *Kibasen* has the same rules as those conducted in normal schools.

To use Baskerville as an example–, whether you snatch the white band that Aria is wearing on her head, she falls from her horse, or the horse collapses; they will be disqualified and counted as a defeated cavalry unit. Following these simple rules, you must destroy the opposing team. The battle takes place in the pool, while wearing elective swimsuits, with a water depth of one metre. Blows

given with the hands and feet are allowed. Also …

「Use of bullets is restricted to non-lethal ammunition: sticky and slippery bullets. The magazines are scattered on the bottom of the pool, retrieve and use them. First-years, immerse yourselves! Next, Second-years, immerse yourselves!」

The only unusual rule is that weapons are allowed; a special rule in the style of Butei High.

The order given by Ranbyou, using the steps, the girls began to descend into the pool, which was about to turn into another Omaha Beach.[33]

Shouting, *"Kyaa, it's cold!"*, The girls entered the water– their cries both shrill and hard on the ears.

Umh … Uhh?… This is… great!

With them now in the water, the girls that made up the horse were covered by water and could not be seen clearly. Although the rider was still completely visible, this is a definite improvement for me.

These girls show almost no embarrassment, so the effect of my presence continues to lessen. They also seem to be ignoring the fact that I am here, so that is certainly another point in my favour. Experience shows that the more embarrassed a girl acts, the easier it is for me hyster-ise by accident.

Boom! *Bang!* *Bang!* *Bang!* *Bam…!*

In another competition outside, I could heat the sound of gunfire. The hellish '*Sabage* with real bullets' has begun, but here in the pool, I am also in my own personal hell, *Kibasen* in water. It's hell on earth; hell in the water– truly, a faithful picture of Normandy.

「Both armies: ATTACK! OPEN FIRE! KILL YOUR ENEMY!」

Excited by the sound of gunfire, Ranbyou happily raised her M500, and firing it at the ceiling, gave the signal for the start of the competition. Unfortunately, it is because of people like her that wars will never entirely disappear from the Earth.

「Ah, Wha-!, Whaa-! *gurgle*」

Splash!

The cavalry formed by the fragile girls of CONNECT and INFORMA came together, and Nakasorachi's unit went down… before the fight even started. Sinking in the water, the only evidence left behind was the headband she had been wearing that now floated on top of the water.

Ignoring Nakasorachi's cavalry unit, who had already perished, the Red Team, began a splashing charge against the White Team.

Bang! *Bang!* *Bang!* *Waaa!*

As the sounds of war cries and gunfire blended, the battle began. Knocking a rider off their horse with non-lethal ammunition, gluing two horses together with sticky bullets, or crumbling them with slippery bullets, the entire area was laid waste. This is a cavalry battle– with all that label entails.

「Hojotoho! Hojotoho! Heiaha!…!」

With the accompanying music of *The Ride of the Valkyries*[34], The reserve troops began singing in chorus from the rear. The girls from CVR, whose main weapon is sex appeal, did their part. Practically useless in a fight, they planned to raise the fighting spirit of their comrades with their singing.

U-uwa…!

I stole a small glance through the window shield, but immediately withdrew my gaze. CVR consists of only the most beautiful girls and, of course, their cavalry is made up of them… but wearing swimsuits. Watching them is too dangerous for me.

「Wahahahaha! Our army is unstoppable!」

Hearing an anime-like voice that was not Aria's, I turned towards the section of the pool it had come from and where also the clear superiority of the Red Team was evident. With bullets, they drove the White Team before them, herding them into a corner of the pool where they were surrounded and, one by one, shot down.

That coordinated attack…!

Seeing them, there was no doubt they were the members of the Anime Association. Despite not being an official school club, this group has enough power to overcome the barriers of age and grade, and that is not something that can be taken lightly.

The one who just shouted was their president, Tomomi Kanetsuki. Posing as a child, her specialty is to infiltrate and gather information. She is a second-year attached to LEZZAD.

「Come on, Tohyama-kun! Be a proper Second!」

Takamagahara-sensei yelled, forming a megaphone with her hands.

「B-Butei Law, Article 1: Believe in your friends and help them…」

Hidden behind the shield, I gave a directive that could possibly be construed as an order. Peeking through the small window, I saw…

「Grrr… You… I'll open a wind-hole…! huh? Ammo! Ammo![35] I need bullets now!」

The White team had fallen into a significant numerical disadvantage. To make matters worse, Aria found herself surrounded by three units of second-year girls and out of bullets. Yelling, she mixed in some English words.

That's a bad habit you have whenever you get nervous.

Aria raised her back, in other words, she held her head low, so that her headband became hard to grab. A rider from ASSAULT attacked the unarmed Aria, while a rider from SNIPE opened fire, and another from LEZZAD pulled on her swimsuit, trying to upset her balance.

「Hey…!」

Suddenly, just as the rider from ASSAULT was about to take Aria's white headband… From behind the enemy, a hidden rider from the White Team emerged from the water and snatched her red headband instead.

…*Kaname!*

The rider who had just appeared was Kaname– a first-year. And to think she just beaten a second-year. That is a great feat!

Kaname–in her modern school swimsuit that covered her chest–, took 2 magazines and saying nothing, tossed them to Aria.

「Now for the other one!」

She jumped towards the rider from LEZZAD and snatched the

headband– another amazing feat. And if that were not enough, she used the enemy horse as a stepping stool to jump back onto her own horse, but…

The rider from SNIPE– equipped with an M-1500 Heavy Barrel Howa rifle, had predicted this.

Kaname turned around and immediately braced herself, using both arms to protect he r eyes. Then…

「And so the tables are turned!」

Pum! *Pum!* *Splotch!* *Splotch!*

Using the magazines Kaname had given her, Aria quickly reloaded her guns with slippery bullets and shot the enemy horse.

Slick! *Slick!* *Slip!* *Splash!*

「Kyaa!」

As her horse crumbled, the sniper took careful aim as she slid, and just as she fired…

Pum! *Clang!*

Aria hit the rifle barrel with her slippery bullets, allowing a sufficient angle for the ricochet to miss Kaname and causing the shot to graze her wrist.

「Uh… Thanks, Aria. You saved me.」

「You saved me as well. Thanks Kaname.」

「Well… There's still work to be done, right?」

「That's what it looks like.」

Aria and Kaname were back to back– opposite sides of the same coin. Meanwhile, two enemy units had begun to stealthily surround them, drawing closer and taking up positions to cover each other as they set their attack positions.

「If you fall off first, you have to buy me a whole box of caramel candy, Aria.」

「And if you fall off first, you have to treat me to a tower of peach

buns.」

Seeing both of them grinning broadly as they laughed, my eyes widened.

That is like…

…the harmony between me and Aria.

That's not to say that our dispositions or feelings coincide at all. Aria and I have opinions that will never agree, but when we fight together, there is a spirit of harmony between us. It's not something that can be explained by logic– the secret of this unity. We synchronize as a perfect duo, Aria and I, and now, Kaname and Aria.

Gradually the siege closed in around Aria and Kaname. Meanwhile, outside the lines…

「Follow me!」

Jeanne, taking command of the abandoned troops, led a charge of the White Team Cavalry as they attacked with in a "V" formation– an inverted variation of the crescent moon. This is a formation that is used when you are outnumbered to concentrate all your offensive power onto a single point of the enemy's ranks and shred them to pieces.

The design of Jeanne's swimsuit was so old that I wanted to call out, asking what kind of store would even sell such a thing. It was a white bathing suit, a so-called "high-cut leg"[36] With a huge scarlet rose emblazoned on it. Wielding a CZ-100 pistol she led the charge with great enthusiasm as if she were the first Jeanne D'Arc.

「We are a small army, but do fear! Our army has the blessing of Heaven!」

Wow… She is in high, fighting spirit. With a confident expression, she struck a dramatic pose and held it for about 1-3 seconds. Rather…

Jeanne, maybe you're trying to imitate your world famous ancestor? But you do know that you are only involved in a ridiculous Water-Kibasen, right? Don't forget that, at least.

****

Thanks to Jeanne's inspiration, the first-year girls increased their battle power…

The Water-*Kibasen* ended with the fall of Kanetsuki's horse, as she shouted 'It was not in vain…'.[37] The Red Team was completely annihilated– The White Team was victorious.

During the melee, Riko surreptitiously used her twin-tails to tug on the enemy's swimsuits.

Is that even allowed? Well… I couldn't care less.

Soon after, Ranbyou received a report that the '*Sabage* with real bullets' had also been won by the White Team. Adding it to the points earned in Part One, the total score was: 20,886 vs. 865 points, so the White Team had won both halves.

At the side of the pool, the girls from the White Team cheered, but hidden behind the shield, I can only hear their voices. Personally. I don't care, but for Aria, who is obsessed with victory and defeat… Fortunately her good mood was not spoiled by the outcome.

As for me hiding behind the shield, just when I thought I could retire, the girls from the Red Team found me and began to vent their frustrations on me, yelling: *"Good for nothing*", *"Womanizer"*, *"Closet Pervert"*… among other kind and pleasant things that were lost in the confusion. Now it is becoming clear– I'm their punching bag.

Oh well, do whatever you want, just don't start shooting.

In the end, I went to return my shield– which proved to be somewhat of an empty protection–, to AMDO, carrying it in my numb arm. Thus my sports festival, both the First and Second Part, came to an end.

The worst part though is that tomorrow all the jealous guys will be congratulating me for being a part of the Water-*Kibasen* and asking endless questions about it.

This festival held nothing good. Truly… Not a single thing.

****

MASTERS gave students who were a part of the victorious White team, each, a dozen bullets as a prize. Just enough to fill a

magazine. It is such a ridiculous amount that would take less than five seconds for Aria, in a bad mood, to fire off at my pathetic self for some non-existent reason such as, *“I don’t like the look in your eyes.”* or something like that.

Furthermore, the awarded bullets are of low quality. The bullets I received were 9mm Wolf WPA-MC[38]. The distribution company is based in the US, but the ammunition is manufactured in Russia, and that is not encouraging.

Their price is 14-15 yen, even pencils that they give out as prizes in normal schools are more expensive.

The casings aren’t even brass–they’re steel…

Already disgusted, I noticed that they were a little rusty.

So that was it…

These bullets were in stuck in storage for a long time, and today they saw a golden opportunity to get rid of them.

As if anyone could use this junk! Bullets have an expiry too! Weren’t you the ones that taught us that!?

****

As the official ammunition disposal procedure is a pain, I buried the bullets in the ground、and headed to a convenience store for some food.

****

In a normal school, there are meal breaks, but at Butei High…

「Only an Italian army eats between each battle![39]」

It was an absurd rationale that Ranbyou extracted from her ‘Theories on Child-Abuse’, so meals had to be postponed until after the sports festival.

I’d just like ask one question: Since when did Butei High become a military training ground?

Since we were free to choose where we ate, most students changed back into their school uniform and ate their bentos wherever they wanted.

Post-battle clean-up and repairs from the '*Sabage* with real bullets' hadn't been carried out, so there were empty shell casings everywhere and the lingering scent of gunpowder. Anyway….

Hunger is the best seasoning in the world. If you have an empty stomach, no matter what you eat, it will be delicious.

While remembering that proverb that my brother used to recite, I went to buy some food…

「Huh?… Nothing?」

The shelf where they should be bentos is empty. Not one noriben, instant ramen, not even onigiri… Everything is gone.

It seems that the convenience store makes their own food and, while I was burying my bullets, the students from the festival bought it all. Now they were sold out.

If I go back to the to the school cafeteria, there is sure to be a long so line, I'll die of starvation.

There is no other choice… I'll have to ask the Baskerville girls to share some of their bentos with me.

If I beg a little bit from the four of them, I can gather enough to make a portion for myself. So I took out my mobile and called Aria.

「Hey, Aria. Where are you? Will you honour Butei Law: Article #1 and give me some food.」

To communicate my request for a supply of food.

「Don't abuse Butei Law, Mr. Hyena. We are at the decommissioned vehicle lot: section 14, Kaname is here too.」

It seems that Kaname is with the Baskerville girls.

A little worried about Kaname, I headed for the decommissioned vehicle lot at a brisk pace.

This is the place where ASSAULT and SNIPE hold counter-terror exercises and is also dotted by wrecked vehicles used by LOGI for something like stunt-driver training. I guess they're eating somewhere in there. I wandered around a bit, until…

「Oh!」

In front of an old-style Volkswagen Transporter, painted white and indigo–top and bottom–, facing the open door was Haimaki. It was a motor-home, and peering in, I saw the spacious interior.

「Ah! Onii-chan!」

Holding a caramel walnut muffin, Kaname is sitting in one of the rear seats. On the movable seats– which I assume were the cleanest– Kaname, Aria, Shirayuki, Riko, and Reki were sitting in a circle.

They had already changed into their sailor suit school uniforms, and the food that was my goal, was in my sights.

「Even though I'm the leader, you left me out again!?」

While I let that complaint hang… I sat down…

Huh? Why did you leave me the low seat?[40]

Next to the well-bred Shirayuki there was an empty seat, so I sat down there.

「You were digging a hole next to the road and acting strangely, so I didn't say anything.」

「Welcome back, honey.」

「*giggle* Hee hee! A little later Riko-rin will sit on Ki-kun's lap!」

And Reki, who was eating a Calorie Mate, gave me a passing glance in silence.

Completely ignoring the reactions of those four, I began to analyse the atmosphere between Kaname and the girls of Baskerville, and so far, there isn't a hint of conflict.

They seem to be… getting along.

It seems that because of their mutual support in the Sports Festival, something like a feminine bond of friendship has developed between them.

Riko is friendly with everyone.

Reki is friendly with no one– but that's normal…

Aria is sitting next to Kaname.

And Shirayuki, taking a handkerchief, was dabbing around Kaname's mouth.

Well, Shirayuki was also putting on an air that said: *'Kin-chan, look, look how far my great tolerance extends!'*, so I found that typical type of expression a little irritating but…

They have been completely captivated by you, Kaname

It may be that Kaname possesses an unusual ability to fascinate individuals. Even me, I came because I was anxious about her.

「Kinji, you have a face that says Kaname and us eating at the same table is a miracle.」

Using her amazing sense of intuition, Aria said this, narrowing her eyes and grinning like a cat.

「Yeah, something like that. Since your relationship until now consisted of crossing swords or pointing guns at each other.」

「Heh heh… But wasn't it that way with all of us?」

「Yeah, that's true.」

「Furthermore, that surprise attack is in the past. The Lumberjack issue has also been settled. That means that our quarrel is over.」

So quick to forgive, Aria. Shouldn't that work for me, too?

It took 5 months in Shirayuki's case, and six in Riko's, but you still keep complaining about me, saying: *"You're a horrible lady-killer."* So it appears that the girls' relationship has taken a turn for the better. At least in that respect, it means that we have settled one problem.

「By the way, you've found a nice spot in the midst of the lot's general disorder.」

「Kaname brought us here to tell us about herself.」

Riko, like Aria, was also eating a burger and fries, and she looked over at Kaname, then me.

「…About herself?」

I asked.

「Kaname is a Genion who escaped the Los Alamos research labs, a human weapon.」

Aria said that, and I was a slightly taken aback.

So they talked… about her origins.

This a matter that concerned Aria and others, and , as the leader of Baskerville, Watson entrusted the task of disclosure to me, but, since it was part of Kaname's private life, I never told them about it.

I turned to Kaname, looking at her deep ocean-blue eyes, and they seemed to say: *"I didn't tell them about HSS or anything awkward. Don't worry."*

「And… What do you think about it?」

「We thought, *"So what?"*. It doesn't change anything. No matter where a person comes from, for us, Kaname has always been Kaname. Besides that– nothing.」

Chomp!

Taking a huge bite of her burger, Aria responded dismissively.

Shirayuki, Riko, and Reki's eyes bore an expression of agreement.

「Her denial: *"I'm not human!"*, was the only thing we did not agree with. She was raised with that conviction, but after you scolded her and showed her the value of life, she made a fresh start. Someone with that kind of determination is nothing but human.」

Aria delivered that typical vague, take-charge kind of speech.

How many times have I said it… This girl… In cases like these, Aria is a great person– despite her small size.

Hearing Aria's words, Kaname hung her head as tears filled her eyes. She said something too– wanting to meet the Baskerville girls half-way, I guess.

「First… I have not told you the most important thing. What you don't know about that ambush…」

Her head still held low, Kaname said weakly. Turning towards us

and lifting her head, Kaname paused silently for a moment, then…

「…Please forgive me…!」

She blurted it out.

You've apologized properly. That's very admirable, Kaname.

In life, it's not as if apologising will fix everything, but people who live un-apologetically complicate relationships with other people and, to a greater or lesser extent, leave behind an uncomfortable feeling in their wake.

「…」

Such an apology from former enemy being a rare development, Aria and the girls didn't know how to react. As if seeking to support each other, they began exchanging glances.

「On our side too, we're sorry for dragging you into something as immature as a Lumberjack.」

Just as I thought, in such a situation you can rely on Shirayuki. The oldest of seven sisters, she is good at dealing with people who are younger.

「In fact, today, we brought you a small reconciliation gift.」

In one swoop, Shirayuki produced a wrapped gift.

「This is something that Kin-chan has. I also have one, but I made it for my myself… Aria also has one like it. It was Aria who came up with the idea.」

「You don't need to say something like that!」

Sitting next to Shirayuki, Aria turned red.

Kaname took the small package.

「…For me…?」

Kaname mumbled, opened the small bag…

「…?」

The thing she took out of the bag was hard to describe.

It was soft in the hands, and when she turned it, I could tell it was a plush mobile strap… I spotted what appeared to be a head.

「It's a Leopon! But handmade. We each made a part of it, so it is a new sub-species– Leopon-Chimera! Riko-rin made the body… ROAR!!! Hee, hee…! Quiet now…!」

And as Riko bellowed again, she crushed one of her wrists against the roof of the Volkswagen, and with a noise she fainted in agony.

Aria and I have one (and now I find out that Shirayuki also has one). We got them as a prize from the UFO Catch[41]. It is a cat-like stuffed animal. What the girls made was a copy of that Leopon.

「I made the head, Aria the tail, and Reki made the legs.」

Shirayuki finished explaining, and Kaname took another look at her Leopon-Chimera.

The head that Shirayuki made was feminine and very well done.

The body Riko made was a gaudy patchwork of frills that had been sewn together. Ignoring the original model and doing whatever she wanted is just what I expected of her.

The legs Reki made were outrageously realistic, and the cat-like hind legs even had reverse-joints. It's as if they were taken from an expertly done taxidermy. The effect was sickening.

The tail was made from the wick of an alcohol lamp and looked like a simple piece of white string with a piece of rolled cloth sewn onto the frayed end. Moreover, it was also evident from the haphazard stitching that this was probably the first thing they had ever sewn in their life. More precisely…

At least use a thread colour that almost matches the material, Aria! These are just your favorite colours.

On the whole, it's poorly constructed. In the first place, each of them has contributed way too much for any kind of collaboration, and looking at the final product, it's a disaster.

But… But, their work was full of spirit.

Each of the four, had poured their soul into the task.

That idea was conveyed in the blink of an eye. Thick-headed as I

am– Iunderstood. And I knew Kaname understood as well. There was no confusion.

Even I, who am not remotely crafty, noticed from the first moment I saw him. And I'm sure the feelings of all four were conveyed to Kaname.

Jingle!

A small bell sewn on her Leopon's neck rang.

Kaname, completely happy, hugged her beloved Leopon-Chimera tight. At that moment, the tears of happiness that had welled up earlier, began falling in large drops.

「Girls… Th-Thank you…」

And she began to cry profusely.

She has never had friends like this. You could say that she has had partners or colleagues as 'friends', but these people in front of her don't care about profit or loss– these are true friends… And the fact that she gained four of them at once, has touched Kaname.

Because of that, she is shedding tears of happiness, as is to be expected of a normal, cute young girl.

「Hey, Ki-kun! That girl is cute. C'mon help a buddy out! She is *so* cute! I wouldn't mind having her as my little sister!」

Aria reached out and gathered Kaname to her chest, as Riko dropped a Mutou-esque line…

Hey… the wrist you hit just a moment ago was the one that was twisted in an unnatural way. Are you sure you're okay?

「Hey Kaname… Don't cry. Butei shouldn't cry so easily.」

As always, her mood swings are drastic. I tried to say something helpful to Kaname, but I just said what I was thinking. Right now I think that her tears are a good thing.

….*Growl!*…

And as if someone had poured a bucket of cold water on it, the mood was ruined by the sound of my stomach. All this time, I had forgotten that my stomach was empty. I had originally come here

for food.

「Uh… I can eat anytime… 」

After I said that, the modest Shirayuki who had not opened her bento box until I arrived, spread a paper napkin in front of my knees with an angelic smile on her face.

I wonder what you will give me?

Seeing the excitement on my face, Aria glared at me.

Plop!

She took the pickles off of her hamburger, (I'm guess you don't like them) and threw them on my napkin.

You! How often have I asked you for a favour?… Do you think a human can live on pickles?

But of course, I couldn't complain… For one thing, on a normal day she can hit a punching machine with 100kg of force.

「Kin-chan, here. I made this. I used the freshest ingredients I could find. 」

While saying this, Shirayuki, moving her hands gracefully, took from the basket…

Oh, sandwiches!

It's not that they are just convenient to prepare. There was Roast Beef, Smoked Salmon, American Club, BLT, Margarine and Tsubuan, and many more types in abundance.

「Oh! Yuki-chan, you really can cook anything! 」

Even the self-proclaimed 'Sandwich Expert' Riko's discriminating tastes are satisfied, and she began leaning closer.

「If a woman cannot cook, she cannot be a good wife. Greeting her husband with delicious food every day as he comes home from work, that is the duty of the ideal wife[42]. 」

Elated by her 'victory', Shirayuki started smiling, but, feeling singled out by her words, Aria replied…

「*Humph*… Cooking is what maids are for. *Chomp!*」

Turning away and crossed her arms, she stuffed her cheeks with a huge bite of her burger. Now that I look closely…

What is that? A burger stuck between two peach buns. Would that be a… peach bun-burger? Does that even exist!? Apparently it does, because there it is.

「In marriage, each party is independent, and they just eat what and whenever they like. That is how adults act. Although for anniversaries, holidays and Christmas dinner they might make something special.」

Voicing those undisguisedly Western-born idea… What… Miss Aria? Why are you beaming victoriously back at Shirayuki?

They both had an exaggerated expression of: *'Victory is mine!'* on their faces, and having exchanged their respective opinions on the proper husband and wife dynamic, regarded each other with a look that said: *'Poor loser.'*.

「Aria, I hope that someday you will find someone to love you.」

Smile

「And you keep trying to find one that doesn't see your true nature, Shirayuki.」

Fiendish Grin

But… what the hell…?

For some reason, beads of sweat ran down my forehead. In this conflict, it seems that there has been some kind of 'double victory'[43]. But for me, as an outsider, it's just another thing I will never understand about the female world.

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A little later …

Aria and Reki had some work to do, Shirayuki had some Student Council business, and Riko was going to watch a live-broadcast on Youtube[44], so they each left separately.

In the now almost empty Volkswagen Bus, were only Kaname and I.

The autumn sun fell as fast as a bucket dropped in a well, and darkness closed in around us. I'm reading my Butei Notebook by the LED's hanging from the roof the van.

Riko stole some of the sandwiches, but in exchange gave me a bento made to look like an anime character that I didn't recognise. Reki gave me a Calorie Mate to eat as well.

Thanks to them I was saved from hunger, and now I'm lying across the long, bench-like van seat.

Without even thinking about it, I began watching the stars through the window.

And amidst the gentle buzzing of the insects…

Resting her head next to mine and forming a letter "L" with our bodies, Kaname was lying across another
seat.

「Onii-chan, when you came here… you were a little upset.」

「I was worried when I heard that you were with Aria and the girls.」

Now that I think back on it… Why was that? I was so concerned about Kaname, I even forgot my hunger.

「Onii-chan, you were… worried about me…」

Kaname mumbled. She was happy for some reason, and embarrassed, I turned a little red.

「It was good that you could open up to everyone. Shirayuki was doting on you.」

Since ending of Lumberjack, Shirayuki has been softening towards Kaname… almost kind. It was a little surprising.

「Shirayuki Onee-chan is very insightful, isn't she?」

Deftly reversing our roles, Kaname rolled over and raised herself onto an elbow as she turned towards me.

「Insightful?」

「Before you arrived, she said, *'I'm sure.'*」

「Of what?」

「That we are brother and sister.」

「…」

Shirayuki says she can *'see people'*…

Just by looking at a person's photograph, she has the ability to guess their true origins and character. It works on the basis of affinity between her and the target, and it doesn't matter whether or not she can see the person. She can't do it all the time, but when she can, her success rate is amazingly high.

That Shirayuki was the one who said it…

「You… are not my little sister. No matter who says I will not accept it. It has to be an aberration[45] and I won't believe it.」

In a bad mood, I said that, and Kaname nodded with a bitter laugh of resignation.

「Heh. I am very happy… to have two Tsundere brothers.」

While saying something I didn't understand, she turned, and we were both looking outside through the window. It really seems like we are two sibling with free-time, just hanging out in this pleasant environment as time slips by…

Jingle!

The sound of a bell broke the silence.

Casting a glance over to Kaname, she was hugging the Leopon-Chimera that the Baskerville girls had given her and started nodding off.

「Hey, Kaname. Don't fall asleep, go home if you want to go to bed.」

I repositioned myself on the seat, and Kaname shook her head.

「Let me stay… a little longer. Right now, I'm remembering …」

「Remembering what?」

「Everything that happened just now… the time I spent with

everyone… and with my Onii-chan… 」

For some reason, Kaname has a very happy look on her face and is looking at me without saying anything.

「 For today, and from now on, you make your life whatever you want it to be. The girls are experts at finding easy meals. If you want, you could eat with them tomorrow. If you do, I'll be there too. 」

「 Tomorrow too…? 」

Kaname embraced her Leopon-Chimera and the bell rang again.

Jingle!

「 Onii-chan. 」

「 Yeah? 」

「 This what they call a dream, right? 」

「 Even if I wanted it to be, it's reality. 」

「 But life is fun… and beautiful… and so is the world… Heh… heh… I didn't know that… 」

She spoke the second half of t his sentence sleepily, so I gently laid my hand on her head.

I had forgotten.

In this school, where guns are drawn in the course of a casual conversation and we have to fight all the time, I had completely forgotten that there were some who still appreciated the blessing of an ordinary, peaceful day.

I live for those kinds days.

So starting tomorrow, I'll be sure to enjoy them to the fullest. And if my self-proclaimed younger sister chooses to tag along, then I'll gladly shoulder that responsibility.

「 Life… 」

Kaname mumbled that word, already sound asleep…

With no other option, I have to carry my responsibilities home… literally.

「Mmm… Onii-chan, tomorrow… everyone… we'll do something… together…?」

On my back, Kaname was talking in her sleep…

Shirayuki didn't say it, but it seemed like we really were a family.

Well… Anyway… if I went along with it… like playing a game of pretend… It would be alright.

For an ordinary day…

Friends and family are an essential part.

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[End Text]

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1. *'Di-pole (older) brother and (younger) sister'* in Kanji. It's an especially fitting name because 'dipoles' are (usually) a pair focal points of electromagnetic charges that are equal and opposite in charge, and thus effect, and Kinji and Kaname's HSS act like polar opposite personalities.

In case anyone forgot, *'Arcanum duo'* refers to the theoretically perfect system that Kaname thought to gain by partnering with Kinji, where they would be able to activate each others' HSS.

2. This is a reference to a passage from Sun Tzu. The translation for this phrase of advice is given as:

(Be as) *'Swift as the Wind, Silent as the Forest, Fierce like the Fire, and Immovable as the Mountain.'*

3. In Volume 10, Kaname made Kinji agree not to be with another girl, and in return she would not resort to violence. She also promised punishment in multiples of 10 if he lied about breaking their deal. Kinji ended up, accidentally, breaking their promise 3 times, and tried to hide it from Kaname, so she threatened the appropriate number of punishments: 30. –AGlingua

4. Teru-Teru Bozu, a charm used to ask for good weather, and when inverted to ask for rain. It is a piece of fabric wrapped around a round object that looks like a paper ghost doll.

5. Fuuma is speaking an archaic form of Japanese characteristic of ninjas. the '-de gozaru' suffix denotes humility and servitude, and I couldn't find a better way to express it, especially because Kiniji specifically mocks it later.

6. Henohenomoheji

7. This section is a pun. The game they are playing is 'Tamaire' (玉入れ) lit. 'Throwing balls'. It's a game where students compete to throw a number of small, soft balls into a basket suspended on a pole. In Japanese, the word for 'ball'(玉) and 'bullet' (弾) share the same reading 'tama' (たま). To make it work in English, I made a similar pun on the word 'shooting'– Anon-san

8. In the Japanese mythology the 'Oni' (鬼) or 'demons' are the underlings of Enma (閻魔) , one of the rulers of the Underworld. A kanabou is long metal club similar to a mace.

The sense is that the third-years already have an overwhelming

advantage.

9. O-Jizou is a Buddhist monk who took upon himself the education and teaching of every living creature to reach enlightenment. Presumably this requires a saintly (Oh, look a pun!) amount of patience.

10. This makes reference to a Japanese proverb that loosely translates to 'Heaven does no grant two blessings'. It basically means that no one person 'has it all' so to speak, and that we all have our flaws.

11. Takoyaki A Japanese food made of wheat flour, octopus, and other ingredients rolled into a ball.

12. Buildering.

13. I assume this is a baseball reference. It should mean something like 'bad' or 'no good'.

14. *Kibasen*, 'Cavalry War', 騎馬戦 in the original. A popular game school-yard game, similar to the pool game 'Chicken-Fight', but played in a field.

15. "*Ohta Isan*" in the original. Kinji is taking another naturopathic drug for upset stomachs.

16. Watson is English, so s/he speaks Japanese with a foreign accent. In the original this is highlighted by the use of katakana. S/He doubles the length of the first o-vowel sound in the Tohyama name (Romanised: T**o-u**-ya-ma), when in fact, it should only be slightly lengthened.

17. "Second Part" in kanji. Nakasorachi said "maru-ni" (lit. "0-2") in katakana. It's military jargon where individual digits in a number are fully pronounced.

18. Part of the name is *Sabage*–short for 'survival game'. It is the name for Airsoft in Japan. The other part, means 'live ammunition', so it basically means an Airsoft match with real bullets.

19. One part of the name is *Kibasen*. Combined with the other part, it basically means '*Kibasen* in water'.

20. A type of combat between opponents equipped with bullet-proof clothing, and thus bullets become blunt force weapons rather

than piercing.

21. A made-up verb Kinji uses to describe his Hysteria Mode. He uses the Japanese word for 'hysteria'–"hisu-"– with Japanese verb endings, so I added a verb suffix to the English word.

22. Chinese Food. In order: "White Noodle Soup, Spicy Noodles, Steamed Bread"

23. Chinese food. "Pork with Green Peppers"

24. Chinese food. "Preserved Eggs"

25. Chinese food. "Stuffed Peach Bun" also known as "Birthday Bun".

26. Lit. "Extra-large Bulletproof Shield" in Kanji.

27. Acronym for "Special Assault Team" in English (Lit."Special Assault Force") Similar to American SWAT. In kanji it says "Special Forces of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police."

28. Actually 'Buhhda in Hell' , but I made a more familiar reference.

29. The unit consists of a 'rider' and their 'horse' composed of three people, for a total of four people.

30. Lit. "Team". As used in Vol. 7 of the novel. Butei students form 'Teams' and register with MASTERS. It is English in the original to make it clear what it is talking about.

31. Riko's name is usually written in Kanji, however in 'certain kinds of games', this swimsuit is a fetish item.

32. Acronym for 'National Institute of Justice'. A sub-department of The United States Department of Justice, responsible for R&D as well as evaluating and improving equipment and procedures used in the criminal justice system and law enforcement.

'NIJ-III' is a standard of ballistic protection that is supposed to stop all but specially-made armour-piercing rounds.

33. A location of one of the Normandy Landings. Kinji makes this reference clear later.

34. "Ritt der Walkürenritt Walküren" is an opera piece written by Richard Wagner.

The previous sentence is the battle cry of the Valkyries. Heard around the 1,25 mark here if anyone is interested.

35. These last few words are in English.

36. A one-piece swimsuit style, popular in the 1960's.

37. What Kanetsuki actually shouted was やらせはぜんぞ (Yarasehazenzo), the final words of Dozle Zabi from the anime Mobile Suite Gundam.

38. WOLF Performance Ammunition- Military Classic. A sporting ammunition with a polymer-coated steel cartridge manufactured in Russia.

39. During the worst parts of the invasion of Africa in World War II, the Axis' *Folglore* (Lightning) Division–composed of both Italians and Germans–, is said to have lived off of the provisions of enemy soldiers, so they had to eat on the spot after a battle.

40. This has to do with Japanese table etiquette. A Kamiza, or 'high' seat, would be like a seat of honour. Usually the person with the most seniority or leader sits here. A 'low' seat would be just the opposite. It has nothing to do, necessarily, with the seat's elevation.

41. A crane game.

42. 'Yamato Nadeshiko' in the original. An expression that refers to the ideal Japanese woman.

43. This is in English.

44. Nico-nico Douga (Literally: Smile Videos!) in the original. It is a website very similar to YouTube.– Anon-san

45. The word used here could be correctly translated for meaning as 'mistake', but there is a metaphor running throughout this section. It hinges on the Kanji for 'sight' and 'to see', so in order to carry the meaning over, I went with a term from the scientific field of Optics that means, 'The failure of light rays to converge at one focus because of limitations or defects in a lens or mirror'.– Anon-san

3a. The most important reason or purpose for someone or something's existence.

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Chapter Three.

The next day was a school-holiday, so… because I am a diligent student, I went to the library to do some serious studying. However, Riko was there, and she gushed:

「Let's find some H-books! Come on, let's look together!」

I tried not to be pulled into such a dirty, non-school event. So Riko brought several books of female nudes and medical texts, chasing me from around the library, and so my morning was wasted. Finally, she got tired and went home, but at noon Mutou (a.k.a The Idiot) showed up.

「I am a treasure hunter, and I could use your help with something.」

Spouting nonsense like that, it was practically the same scene as this morning with Riko. As a result, my visit to the library was like a game of 'Metal Gear Solid', and was spent running and hiding.

Having completely lost my motivation, I returned to my apartment that afternoon, staggering with fatigue…

Oh! Something smells good in here…

Having worked up an appetite, I went straight into the kitchen where there was a pot of curry already prepared. This is a treasure! Kaname's curry is delicious. Did she change some of the herbs? But she isn't here. It seems that she's out somewhere.

Well, the first-year 'interns' are used for all kinds of chores. They've probably been drafted to do the clean-up from the Sabage with real bullets.

On the table, Kaname's handiwork: 'Onii-chan Plush' + 'Kaname Plush' were placed. She gave them to me a few days ago, and apparently she discovered them inside the bullet-proof closet where I had discarded them.

Having lost all intention of studying, I decided to watch some television while eating curry, but as soon as I had eaten, and because of the increased blood flow to my stomach[1], I became tired.

「There is no greater pleasure in the world than sleep…」

And so, while mumbling my grandfather's favourite phrase, I went to my bedroom, and flopping onto my bed, I laid down.

Then…

Riko was straddling me, forcing me to look at Goya's *'The Naked Maja'* that had somehow become *'The Naked Aria'* so, I woke from that horrible nightmare and jumped to my feet. Concerned that I might hysterise in my sleep, I checked my pulse… I… I'm fine…

「*sigh*」

With that sigh of relief, I reached the bathroom. It seems that Kaname hasn't returned. The charger for her HMD[2] has moved, so she came back at least once and went back out again but… the leftover curry hasn't been touched. Thinking that I might have some messages, I checked my mobile.

…?

What's this? The signal reception is turned off!

Instead, a status is displayed: 「Standalone Mode」. The mobile connexion is cut off. It is a mode where you are unable to receive either calls or messages. I never use that setting. 'Someone' changed it.

I tapped through the menu to disable Standalone Mode, when…

I received voice-mails and messages from Jeanne, Shirayuki, and the others, along with several from other numbers. As I was about to check the contents of the messages, I received a call from an unknown number. I answered it out of reflex.

「Tohyama? Not answering your telephone was a little worrying. Gird yourself for battle quickly!」

That voice… It's Tamamo.

「Gird? You mean put on combat gear? Why?」

「'Why's' and explanations are unnecessary! Begin!」

「…!?」

I had a bad feeling about this…

「Mine Shikigami[3] have reported. G-Third has returned to Tokyo.」

Tamamo had spoken the words I did not want to hear.

「The location is East-South-East of the Shinagawa Thermal Power Station. Shirayuki and Jeanne are at the Ebara Temple nearby. You must hurry there! Is G-Fourth–Kaname– with you?」

「No…She isn't.」

「That is very unfortunate…」

Worried, Tamamo was silent a moment.

「That G-3! He has great battle-luck. While we are scattered and our defences spread thin, he turns up. I sense that it will be a hard-fought battle…」

Agitated, she fell deep into thought.

For Tamamo, good luck is required in all important matters. Now it seems she is holding her in her hands.

「In any case, I have to go too. What about the others?」

「Riko and Reki are already underway. Aria is at that place called AMDO and moving at high speed. Watson called me a moment ago, and he has set out and is on his way to your apartment.」

Having rapidly summarised the situation, the intercom doorbell rang.

Watson was here.

Wearing the same equipment from the day of our battle at the SkyTree, he arrived to help, and with my gun, bullet-proof uniform, a magazine, and my right and left hand Orochi[4], we flew out of the boy's dormitory. In front of the building, Watson's Porsche 911 was parked. It had a revolving red emergency-vehicle light attached to the canopy.

「What now, Tooyama?　It appears that G-3 is on the opposite bank from Butei High, near the Thermal Power Station.」

Watson asked as he jumped into the driver's seat and started the

car.

By 'What now', I guess he's asking about logistics.

「Going by sea would difficult. We don't have a boat ready, and the coastal route is full of bridges and flood gates that might dead-end.」

「And as for going by car…. Unfortunately the Tokyo Harbor Tunnel is under repair. Crossing on foot, let alone by car, is impossible. We'll have to take the highway and turn off at Shibaura. But that will take twenty minutes!」

Damn it! It's because it's almost the end of the year. This is the annual 'Seasonal Road Maintenance'. The only direct route is by air, but getting something like a helicopter would take even more time.

「There's no time to hesitate. We'll take the car. Go!」

As I jumped into the passenger seat, I turned off the handbrake and shouted at Watson to drive.

「*Sniff*… Tooyama, *what* did you eat today?」

I heard this sudden question, and Watson leaned over while driving, confusion on his face.

「Nothing special. Just some of Kaname's curry…」

「It's faint, but the smell… your breath smells of Valerian. It is a sleeping drug, and its smell can be masked when mixed with other herbs. You've taken quite a lot. Hadn't you noticed?」

Watson is also a doctor, so for him to to say that… I gasped with realisation. Now that I think about it, today's curry smelled and tasted a little different than usual. Kaname is usually very particular: *'I will make the curry exactly the same way that you liked so much.'*

What does this mean… Kaname?

I immediately tried to call Kaname with my mobile, but of course, she never answered.

Did you go… to where G-3 is? What are you planning to do? Kaname…!

Inside the car, there is a dual-use monitor for a SatNav. The screen also had a video-conference call function linked to Jeanne and was transmitting a video feed from the mobile that she had cleverly placed in the chest pocket of her school uniform.

We turned left, towards the Rainbow Bridge entrance and…

Damn it…!

The road is jammed. For now, we can only monitor the situation on the screen. The monitor and tied-in onboard speakers were of such high quality, we were hearing Jeanne's voice so clearly that it was like we were there with her.

「Tohyama, Watson. I don't have my headset[5], so I'm using my mobile's earpiece with speaker-phone turned on. They may hear any loud noises you make, so please be advised.」

Maybe it was because she was so close, but Jeanne's voice was tense.

On the monitor, and carrying Irokaneayame, Shirayuki's profile was displayed as she stole a glance at the situation. They are operating as a two man unit– a wise choice.

Jeanne and Shirayuki are moving past the hexagonal prism shaped cooling tower, erected south of the Shinagawa Thermal Power Station. Beyond them, I see a natural gas tanker in Tokyo Bay.

Meanwhile, Riko, Reki, and finally Aria were connected to the feed in 'Audio-only' mode.

「Ugh…」

In unison, we all groaned, with hint of surprise in our voices.

It's him…

His grim face was painted as if he were wearing sunglasses, and he also wore an HMD.

That awesome presence… there can be no mistake.

Striking a bold pose, it's G-3– standing on top of the water!

Judging by his balanced posture, he seems to be standing on something, but I can't see what it is. Whatever it is, it's probably

invisible.

He is wearing an outrageous jet black helmet, several pieces of armour, and a matching black coat that is fluttering in the wind. Both coat and armor were trimmed with gold and gold thread.

Remembering the day of the Bandire[6]— G-3 is as flashy as ever.

He is angry with someone on the shore, and his attention is turned towards what appears to be a public park. G-3 is talking to someone on the lawn.

It's Kaname…!

In addition to her HMD, she is also wearing body armor. On both hips she is wearing two swords, and crossed on her back are two more– in all, she has four *Neue Ange* blades. This is the most heavily armed I have seen her.

And to make matters worse…

「Wha…?!」

As Jeanne emitted a gasp, words failed me, and my eyes widened in shock. I couldn't speak. I couldn't do anything but stare in astonishment.

That person took everyone's breath away. They caught every eye, because of their angelic beauty.

In the corner of a shipping yard, a crane on the border of land and sea soared into the sky. They were wearing a bulletproof brown long-coat and high-laced combat boots.

Ka…Kana!

Kana sat on the crane arm.

And judging by the distance of her position… She is not on Kaname's side, but rather on G-3's!

G-3 was gone for a while, in order to meet Kana?!

Her braided chestnut hair fell to her waist and swayed in the sea breeze. Regardless of the fact it was only on a screen, her unchanged beauty left us breathless and made us forget our enemy. But Kana is not only beautiful. She can enter Hysteria Mode at will,

and　is infinitely more skilled in using that super-human power.

While it is true that on one occasion I beat my ‘Nii-chan’ in Hysteria mode, I could never win against ‘Kana’. If we were to fight, I am not confident of victory. Kana is a very special case. It’s likely that she has discovered how to use higher form of Hysteria Mode that I don’t know about, and is on an entirely different level. Moreover, the battle at IU seems to have brought her skills to maturity, and now there is a certain aura about her.

「…」

With her long lashes, Kana sat bathed in the twilight haze… but she is only observing the scene below. On the screen… Jeanne, despite her trembling, moved closer to the three　principals.

「I will now set the camera to wide angle mode. Pray the fortunes of war favour us.」

From her Butei handbook、 she pulled out a fish-eye lens and attached it to her mobile’s camera. Then she set her mobile on a tree branch. At first the image was stretched and warped, but the monitor’s auto-detect function corrected it, creating a panoramic video.

All of them were now displayed on the screen: Kaname, G-3 , Kana, plus Shirayuki and Jeanne, so we were able to grasp the entire situation.　Then Watson began operating the equalizer,　cleaning up the audio and from the speakers…

「Third,　we don’t need to kill them. Baskerville… DEEN, they aren’t the enemy.」

…Kaname’s voice was heard. I got the impression that Kaname was trying to persuade G-3. It also appears that Jeanne and Shirayuki have been detected, and are talking about what they should do.

「Fourth, it’s an order!」

G-3 snapped.

At that moment, Shirayuki showed herself to support Kaname.

「G-3, in addition to Kaname… we have just learned of your emissaries to the Six-Tailed Kitsune, Tamamo-sama, and the Hotogi clan gives you the same answer. We will not hand over our,

‘Irokane and everything to do with it’, to you.」

It seems that G-3 was in private communication with members of DEEN, and that seems to be the connexion where the Hotogi mikos are concerned.

Enough, Shirayuki…!

That man is dangerous. Don’t say anything to provoke him!

Meanwhile, we had just made it to the south end of the Rainbow Bridge, tires squealing as they turned. We have finally made it to the half-way point of our journey. We are ten minutes out.

Taking the current situation into account, and concluding that we should temporarily retreat, I…

「Jeanne! Take Shirayuki and Kaname, and get out of there!」

I screamed at the mic beneath the monitor, and as a result, my voice blasted from the mobile’s speaker.

On the screen, recognising that voice, Kaname turned her head.

「…Onii-chan…?!」

This was unexpected. She probably wanted to keep me from being involved, so her plan was to put me to sleep. I guess I’m awake sooner than she thought.

Your didn’t do enough research, Kaname. Pharmaceuticals have almost no effect on me.

「I… Baskerville… isn’t the enemy, Third…」

Flustered Kaname tried to speak, but…

「Fourth! Are you going to follow my order!?」

「Kaname! Get out of there!」

G-3 and I shouted at the same time. Our voices overlapped, as Kaname cringed away. Then straightening, with knees trembling… she drug her feet as she walked. Making a right about-face, Kaname made her way to G-3’s side. Her face– an expression of wide-eyed panic.

「Kaname …」

I understand perfectly. It's like watching myself.

Kaname, I'm sure… Whenever my brother gave me an order, I had exactly the same reaction. I couldn't defy him, because he was so much stronger than me. No matter what, his orders had to be carried out. I had to obey.

「I have to… Someone stronger than me…」

Her voice, like her shaking hands, trembled…

「… I absolutely can't disobey… because it is completely illogical…!」

Crossing both arms, she drew the swords that were on both her hips.

This is bad… This is very bad…!

Looking down at Jeanne and Shirayuki, Kaname's face… was becoming a sharp glare.

Kaname's personality is being replaced. Taking control is the old personality from when we first met– that of G-Fourth!

「I owe him a debt. He was the one that helped me escape Los Alamos…」

Repeating those reasons to herself, Kaname began to radiate her fighting spirit. Lowering her stance, I saw her concentrate strength into her legs.

「Do you intend to fight? That blade will not work against us.」

Sensing Kaname's fighting spirit, Jeanne and Shirayuki, each drew their swords and stood shoulder to shoulder, the same way as the night of the Lumberjack, taking up the same position for the 'tag-team' technique that destroyed Sonic.

「Kaname, surrender! You can't beat us. That's something you should have realised just recently.」

Shirayuki said, joining in, but Kaname …

「That was a Duel; This is War.」

To her right, and left, a blue fluorescent line glowed on her katanas as she grasped their hilts.

「The one that you were able to destroy was only one of thirteen types of Neue Ange swords!」

Swish!

From under Kaname's foot, grass and dirt flew and scattered. Thanks to her exo-skeleton's assistance Kaname closed distance with girls in a superhuman leap, unsheathing her blades mid-air… No…

「Arc Edge[7]…!」

Drawing those things that cannot be called swords… but rather light-sabers[8]. Drawn from their sheaths, they were a glittering metre long, as Kaname attacked Jeanne and Shirayuki from above, and they spread out to avoid the light-saber…

Whoosh!

As she landed, her shining blades gouged a hole in the ground. Molten lava and white fumes immediately rose and filled the crater she had made.

What… That's…!

It was like a scene from a movie. Her swords looked like the fictional weapons from Star Wars– only more powerful. There is no possible way to safely receive such an attack. Just one touch would slice a person in half… no… rather, disintegrate them. Kaname stowed her light-sabers, and only the grips in the scabbards on her hips remained.

「…Jeanne!」

「Understood.」

Eyes wide, I watched as Shirayuki and Jeanne exchanged their respective blades for magic. Shirayuki began tracing symbols in the air with her hands, and diamond dust began dancing around Jeanne.

Observing Kaname's attack, G-3 gave a snort of disdain.

「Just as I thought. You're broken, Fourth.」

「It's not like that, Third. I'm holding back my weapon's full power. Compared to yours, mine's reaction rate is slower. Boot-up takes longer. If I don't wait for full deployment, the 'multi-faceted crystal' will fuse.」

「No, the problem is with *you*!」

G-3 growled, like a lion– the king of the animals. Turning around, Kaname could only gasp wordlessly.

「Fourth, you can't fool me. You attack was only half intended to kill, and the other half to let them escape.」

「…That's not it…! I…!」

Shaking her shoulder-length hair sideways, Kaname tried to clamour an excuse.

「You're damaged, and stooping to the level of a mere human!」

「No, no, no!」

Holding her head in her hands, Kaname dug her nails into her scalp, as if to rid herself of the alternate personality in her head.

「Fourth! Remember who you are! You are a weapon, and this is war… Move!」

I see now. G-3 is trying to 'fix' Kaname– trying to turn her back into G-4. Without attacking himself, that bastard is trying to make Kaname do it. His plan is to 'fix' Kaname by reverting her personality.

「Why…? Why did it have to become a War…?」

Hiding her face, Kaname…

Shine!

Spreading her arms wide, she drew the twin swords that were fastened on her back. They looked like executioner's swords that were used in the Middle Ages to behead those sentenced to death, but the double-edged blades' fullers were carved hollow. With the 'U' shaped tip… she pointed them at Shirayuki and Jeanne to check their advance, as they stood ready with fire and ice.

「I… I'm… sick of war!」

Whoosh!

Following a high-pitch noise, blue light surged from the swords' hilts. Running swiftly down the edges of the blades and converging at their tips, the light shot out, without a hint of recoil.

「…!」

Speeding on, as if they had been fired from a rifle, the bullets of light, flew toward Shirayuki and Jeanne…

Jeanne made a motion to ward the bullet of light with her sword, but it was not something that could be deflected. Because she was anxiously preoccupied about what would happen to Jeanne, Shirayuki's response lagged, and she was unable to make any kind of move to defend herself.

In the next instant, light-bullets gave off a sound like a rocket-launcher strike (and compared to the size of the bullet, the explosion was on an entirely unbelievable scale) that made me burst into a shout.

「Shirayuki…! Jeanne…!」

As if they had been hit by a train, they were sent flying left and right.

Shirayuki bounced off the ground and collapsed, and Jeanne disappeared from the screen.

「Shirayuki…!」

I watched the screen anxiously…

Underneath Shirayuki's bullet-proof uniform, it seems that she had been wearing chain-maille as a precaution, and now it was in ruins. Then I saw her move and stir slightly. She wasn't insta-killed, but it looks like she has been gravely injured. She can't keep fighting. She needs help now!

Sheathing her swords on her back, Kaname turned towards G-Third, her expression seeming to say: *'That's enough, right?'*. But his response was…

「What are you stopping for? Do you want me to finish it?」

By 'finish', he means 'kill'.

Stop it… Just stop it!

I screamed this uselessly inside my head.

Kaname lifted her sorrowful, tear-stained face. Strapped to her leg was a knife-shaped object– that must be an advanced blade, too. Drawing it…

「A weapon has to fight… Even if they don't want to, they must…」

Step! *Step!*

Crossing the scorched earth, she moved toward Shirayuki.

Silently observing the situation, G-3 chuckled softly with a smug, satisfied smile on his face…

「G-3, rather than just worrying about others, why don't you spare a thought for yourself?」

Kana shouted from atop the crane.

And in the next instant,

BAAANG!

From the on-board speakers came a thunderous noise. It was the sound of a gunshot from someone who is connected to the video-conference in 'audio-only' mode.

After a few seconds…

BANG

From beside of G-3's head, orange sparks flew, and a concealing dust cloud rose from the ground.

Wha-… What was that?!

「The bullet has been deflected. Reason: unknown.」

I realised that the voice from the on-board speakers was Reki's. The loud noise was the sound of a shot from a large calibre sniper rifle– the Barrett M82. The barrel of the M82 is no less than 29 inches long. Its gross weight is over 14kg, and it is almost as long as Reki is tall. Carrying such an impractical weapon, she has secured the

'base' of Academy Island[9], and accurately sniped G-3 in Shinagawa at long-range. The dust cloud was caused by the impact of the bullet, which possesses more power and is of a larger calibre than a Dragunov.

But if so, why did she miss?

I can't believe Reki failed. Those 'sparks' that exploded near G-3… somehow, he
blocked the bullet. The Barrett is an anti-material rifle, with rounds powerful enough to pierce armoured plate, and yet he deflected it… with ease…!

「…!」

Then, high above G-3– from the arm of the crane…

Riko…!

Some time ago, Riko must have sneaked up behind G-3, and now she is diving toward him. In her hand was the same tactical knife that she used in the April hijacking when she tried to kill Aria. She is targeting his head– the only place that is unprotected.

From what I have seen, Reki and Riko… It seems that they are trying to take out G-3– the boss– first. If they succeed, then Kaname will no longer have to follow his orders. That's their plan. They are using the same strategy, and it looks like it's going to work. G-3 is still watching Kaname; he hasn't even looked up toward the falling Riko.

But …

「'Worry'? About things like this…?」

And after he said that…

Smack!

Just as Riko was about to reach G-3, he sent her flying like a baseball. Fresh blood spattering, there was a splash, and a without cry, she fell into the sea. This time I saw what happened. G-3 swatted a hand, effortlessly deflecting her, all without even glancing in her direction…

It's useless… We can't beat him!

We have just sped onto Goshiki Bridge[10]. Our ETA is 5 minutes.

With Neue Ange blade in hand, Kaname stepped up near to Shirayuki.

What should we do?

「Huh… What is that? Tooyama!?」

As we reached Big Kounan Bridge[11], Watson screamed, but he was not watching the monitor, but looking outside the window. Then, pushing my hair back, I turned and looked high and to the right.

「…?!」

In the sky… I could see a light, high above the container yard.

A star… No, it's too close. It's too slow to be a missile, and it doesn't seem to be any kind of aeroplane either– it's much smaller.

The small light soared over the Shinagawa Thermal Power Station.

「In war 'anything goes'… And I was created for war…」

On the monitor, Kaname raised her knife, and when I looked back at the screen…

「Heh. If 'anything goes', then take this!」

From the on-board speakers we heard a seiyuu-like voice, and in rapid succession..

Bang! *Bang!*

「…!?」

At an angle that left Shirayuki protected, something swooped in towards Kaname. Two bullets detonated with an explosive sound, engulfing Kaname in a shower of orange sparks. What I've just seen was…

Incendiary Ammo…!

Bis-hydroxyl Aluminium and Naphtha: exploiting the extreme oxidising nature of these chemicals and their ability to burn at high temperatures, they were incredibly small Napalm bombs. These were just one of many kinds of Butei bullets. This was an air-raid.

Tumble *Tumble*

Rolling, Kaname has escaped the flames and smoke, and is now looking up into the sky. She is probably seeing the same light we had seen in the sky just moments ago. The hand that had held the knife seconds before was empty. The Butei bullets have knocked it away.

「Aria…?!」

Retracting the canopy of his Porsche convertible…

His short hair whipping in the wind, Watson looked up into the sky. Looking in the same direction, now it can be seen with the naked eye– the true shape of the light we saw moments ago.

「Aria… Is that you!?」

With a single layer of white, tasset-like plates flaring from the the back and sides of her bullet-proof uniform skirt… It's Aria!

The contraption was divided into seven variable wings, and below each of them the flames of a jet engine glowed. From what I've seen of their shape and articulation… they're a cross between compact, high-output rocket thrusters and stabiliser planes. These 'wings' attached to her waist allow her to fly.

「Wha-? You're flying! When did you get *that*?!」

Seeing Aria flying as if it were the most natural thing in the world, I couldn't help blurting this out.

「This is a 'Hover Skirt'! It was delivered a little while ago, so I thought that I'd see what it can do. Kinji, stop dragging your feet and get over here!」

As she said that …

Bang! *Bang!* *Bang!*

Firing Incendiary, Exploding, and Fragmenting bullets, Aria was raining an endless hail of Butei bullets onto Kaname. The sound of gunfire coming from the speakers could now be heard directly as well. Rather, it sounded like a real war!

On the screen, I saw Aria shoot armour-piercing rounds at the hollow, double-edged blades that had brought down Jeanne and

Shirayuki, knocking them to the ground and damaging them. With her Barrett M82, Reki targeted and finally destroyed them.

That reminds me…

Tamamo said:*'Aria is at that place called AMDO'*

This is what Aria had ordered while she was in the hospital, and she had gone to pick up her 'rocket booster'– to Hiraga's. If you think about it, her inventions are a lot like 'Neue Ange'. Hiraga is an inventor who creates new, unimaginable weapons one after another, regardless of their reliability.

Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, and technology against technology– In a truly Aria-esque manner, she prepared to face G-3 and his allies head-on. Transformed into a human attack-helicopter, I watched her, dumbfounded.

「All of you, I have rescued Riko. Concentrate on bringing the enemy down.」

Using what had to be Riko's connection, a voice flowed from the speakers. That voice…

「Hilda…?」

In the corner of the screen, the shapes of countless bats had merged– forming something like a black net– and is pulling Riko from the water.

「Hilda, I need you. Hurry and save Shirayuki and Jeanne too!」

I said that but she answered,

「Ho ho! Fool! I do not wish to! Who would follow the orders of an uncouth man like you?」

I still don't know if she is an ally or enemy.

「This…! This is an emergency, and you're babbling about…」

「Let me, Tooyama.」

I was screaming in anger, but covering my mouth with his hand, Watson…

「Sorry for asking you to do something you *can't* do, Hilda.

Although it's gone down a lot, the setting sun is still a problem for you, right?」

While driving, Watson said in a louder voice.

「*What!?*」

Flying into a sudden rage, she raised her voice as well and…

「Watson, I believe that I told you this a long time ago. If I have a parasol, the sunlight is nothing to fear. I have even picnicked at a graveyard in the middle of the day!」

「That's alright, don't push yourself too hard– it's fine. It was thoughtless of Tooyama to ask.　It's impossible for you– rescuing Shirayuki and Jeanne.」

「Watson! You insolent, insolent wretch! You　are speaking to a noble– the daughter of Count Dracula, herself…!」

Click!

Watson disconnected Riko's line to stop Hilda's piercing shout.

「H-Hey, Watson!」

「Don't worry… Now she will definitely rescue Shirayuki and Jeanne.」

Speaking with such confidence, Watson urged me to look back at the monitor, and…

Flap! *Flap!* *Flap!*

With an almost angry motion, countless shapes of bats slipped underneath Shirayuki, and dragging her along, carried her away.

Hilda really rescued them– even though it didn't take her even a second to reject my request.

「She isn't strong enough to fight yet, but we can leave the rescue to her. However, we definitely have to praise her afterwards.」

Now that I think about it, Watson was in contact with Hilda before we met her. The more time you spend with someone, the better you know how to deal with them, right?

Opening my eyes wide at this unexpected side of Killer-Hilda, I looked back at the center of the screen…

Kaname and Aria are still fighting, and Aria clearly has the upper-hand. She is firing Butei bullets unsparingly, applying a brute force approach to the problem.

「*Grunt*…!」

With sticky bullets sealing both of her 'Arc Edge' blades on her hips, Kaname…

Whoosh!

Raising both arms and turning to face the sky, she moved her arms like she was presenting something. Then, from the white smoke that rose from the power plant's smokestack– something flew out of the white sheet-like sky. Spinning as it flew, it was her cloth-like 'X'-shaped cutting weapon. The very same offense/defense flying weapon that had defeated Aria, P-FIBER…. But this time there were two of them, and they closed in on Aria from the left and right, to attack from both sides.

「The same trick won't work twice!」

From her twin Governments, Aria fired two shots. Not at the fabric-like blades, but at Kaname herself. Then…

Shine *Zoom*

Each bullet gave off a burst of light like two tiny suns.

Blinding Flares!

Despite that, Kaname leaned over, unmoving, but the glow has managed to blind her.

With a somersault, Aria nimbly avoided the X-shaped cloth, and it was unable to cope with her sudden evasion. Out of Kaname's control, the two blade-like sheets collided mid-air, slicing each other in half. Delivering the coup de grace, Aria shot sticky bullets to tangle them together completely.

Th-That movement just now…!?

Watching the falling cloth-blades, just now… I saw Aria flare her twin-tails to slow herself like an aeroplane. That was not a flutter

in the wind… That was …

「Ha Ha!」

Watching Aria, G-3 laughed happily.

「I was able to see a hint of the ‘Hidan no Aria’. Kana, your ‘Cognis’[12], as always, was truly amazing!」

「My Cognis is incomplete. I wasn’t able to reach that level of reasoning.」

‘Hidan no Aria’, ‘Cognis’… Kana and G-3 were using the same made-up terms Sherlock used when we were at IU.

Why? What are those two talking about? But now isn’t the time to think about it.

「I’m out of Butei bullets. And I only have 30 seconds worth of fuel. Kinji, how long will it take for you get here?」

Aria’s whispering voice came from the car speakers.

「Not long, It’ll be another… Hold out for another three minutes.」

「OK. I’ll arrest Kaname. You really wouldn’t be able to do it because she’s your *sweeeeet* little sister, right?」

Remarking this somewhat sarcastically, Aria left behind her a vapour trail like a jet engine contrail and came in for a landing. Then, while suddenly accelerating…

Whoosh

Pulling her two Japanese swords from behind her back, she lunged at Kaname.

「Kaname!」

「Aria!」

Reaching out and clasping her hands… from her armour, a ring of light spread. It was like the light of Arc Edge, expanding in a circle and looking like a buzz saw.

「Uwaaaa!」

With a shout, she lunged at as Aria as she swooped down, and with a flying leap she received a slashing attack to her body armour, even as she split the side of Aria's flying unit open.

「Ugh!」

Losing her balance, Aria made an emergency landing, but with a skillful twist, she turned to face Kaname. Then– perhaps because 'Arc Edge' was not designed for long-term use–, after confirming that it was no longer active… Using her functioning rear propellers, Aria launched herself at Kaname.

Ever since I met Aria, it's always seemed like she had rocket boosters– charging in hard and fast–, but this time, equipped with real rocket boosters, she rushed at Kaname, not giving her the time to draw her next weapon, pushing for a hand-to-hand battle.

「Tooyama! From here, run!」

Finally, Watson and I arrived on the scene, and ran to the south side of the power plant that was turning into a battle-ground.

At the power plant itself… In the shadow of the plant's smokestack Riko, Shirayuki, and Jeanne were piled together. They were in no condition to stand.

「…Girls…!」

Seeing this scene, my mind immediately went back. It's exactly the same as that time– the first time G-3 and Kaname attacked.

Once again… I wasn't in time to be of help.

「Tooyama, I'll take care of the wounded. You back-up Aria!」

With a first-aid kit from MEDICA, Watson ran that way. Grinding my teeth and drawing my Beretta, I headed towards the open space the led to the sea. While running….

「Aria, are you alright…!」

Wounded in the battle against Kaname, Aria had sagged to her knees. I saw Kaname start as I arrived, and some P-FIBER extended from behind her back– two sheets on a side. They were probably folded up and stored inside her body-armour. It looked like Kaname had 4 tails.

「Aria, are you okay?」

Threatening Kaname with my Beretta, I moved into a position to guard Aria…

「I'm not finished yet! Watch out, that body-armour is assisting Kaname's hand-to-hand fighting. Each blow packs a punch! That cloth blocks my attacks automatically, and it's hard to get one in. Even though Reki has been giving me cover-fire, I still can't get through.」

With a hiss of steam, Aria ejected from her Hover Skirt. I guess there isn't any fuel left, so it had only become dead-weight.

Now Aria tried to take up a Baritsu[13] stance… but it was no good– her injuries were too great.

Moments ago, Aria had the battle-power and mobility of a fighter jet. If only it had lasted a little longer– then we might have been able to win. But now she is out of fuel and her wounds are very serious. We can't do anything but retreat.

「Kaname …!」

The truth is, she's amazing— You're amazing.

The first time, you single-handedly brought about the crushing defeat of Baskerville. The second time, you've cornered us now. And besides Kaname there, further away G-3 remains unharmed. This is far beyond my ability to handle. However…

…We can still win.

「…Kana! What are you doing up there? Get down and help me fight!」

I yelled at Kana who was sitting on top of the crane wearing her long-coat. If Kana was on our side, we might be able to turn things around. I planned to use her as our trump card, but…

「Kinji, I only came to observe one of the battles of FEW.」

In the fading twilight, Kana stood… unmoving.

「Besides that, I'm 'Neutral'… I have no obligation to fight anyone.」

She blinked her gemstone eyes once and…

「However G-3, you have made Baskerville your enemy. In this war, when someone is defeated… they are either killed or become their enemy's subordinate. To see that those conventions are followed was also one of the reasons I came here today.」

And so saying, she fell silent. In reply…

「I don't care about that… Ha ha! Finally, all of the 'G-bloodline' are gathered together!」

Standing above the sea, G-3's voice boomed.

「Still, I'll kill that worthless guy. There's something strange between Kinji and Fourth.」

Then, crossing the invisible barge he stood on, he started walking towards me.

'G-bloodlines'…?

That's a strange phrase, but I'll have to think about it later.

Since I couldn't convince Kana, I'm out of battle-options. It's time to flee. Taking Aria, Kaname, and everyone else…

「Oi! Don't you run away.」

As if reading my thoughts, G-3 said this, drawing closer with each step…

I felt a terrible air of menace emanating from G-3. He still hasn't moved a muscle to make any preparations to fight.

H-he's strong! Even so… This guy… I understand that much about him.

It seem that even behind me, Aria felt it too, and I heard her swallow her saliva with an audible gulp.

「Kinji, you idiot, what kind of ideas did you put into Fourth's head? She says that
she knows how… but now, of all things, she insists that she can't enter HSS.」

Hearing our conversation, Kaname turned a flustered look towards G-3…

And then facing me again, started panicking.

Kaname…

「Besides that… I don't know what kind of warm welcome they gave her, but she won't finish off those girls either.」

Standing behind the petrified Kaname, G-3….

Bam

With a matte-black metal boot, he kicked Kaname in the back.

「Ah!」

Thud!

Having fallen immediately to her hands and knees without resistance, he said to Kaname…

「Oi Fourth! You've stopped when you could have crushed her. All this time you've had the enemy on the run. But now it's not too late. Finish it!」

G-3 barked, making it an order. Pulling her arms and legs in like a turtle, Kaname groaned. Meanwhile… several places of her armour glowed with an intensifying fluorescent blue light.

「Onii-chan… Forgive me… someone that is stronger than me… I absolutely cannot defy them… That would be, That would be ill-… illogical, so… Forgive me, Forgive me, Forgive me…」

With a trembling voice, how many times was she going to apologise to me? Again, Kaname was trying drawing another advanced blade from somewhere.

Even though she did her best. Even though she gave it everything she had. Even though she doesn't want to fight…

G-3…!

Even in this situation, you still keep pushing her…!

「…Kaname! You don't have to fight! Just stop, don't take orders from someone like that.」

I yelled this boldly, as I pointed my Beretta at G-3.

「He is deceiving, and only want to use you! I don't know why you feel so indebted to him… Don't you see that he only saved you to make you a tool for his own designs! You don't have to pretend to be strong anymore. That guy… You don't have to rely on people like G-3, because *I'll* always be there for you!」

「You sure talk a lot, don't you Kinji? Oi, Fourth, shut this guy up too.」

Pointing a thumb at me, G-3 said this…

「…Don't…」

Kaname, having laid face-down on the ground, muttered something, but it was said in a low, trembling voice so we couldn't hear it well.

「What was that, Fourth?」

「Don't call me that.」

This time she spoke in a clear voice. Kaname stood up from the ground.

「DON'T CALL ME THAT NAAAAME!!」

And turning toward G-3…

Clank! *Clank!* *Clank* *Clank!*

Like a kind of shell being cracked, Kaname's body-armour opened in several places. On the inside tiny nozzles were ranged in lines.

WHOOOOSH!

And with that, her jet engines flamed to life.

「Raaaaahh!」

With explosive force, Kaname launched herself at G-3. Enveloped by blasting hot wind, Kaname and G-3 clashed…

…And closing distance, they missed each other.

「Kaname…!」

Hidden inside her armor, was what I suppose is a disposable solid-fuel rocket engine. The flames have already died down. With unfathomable explosive force, I saw Kaname dart forward in a ramming attack from point-blank range with her insta-kill equipment… and using that she only managed to rush past G-3 behind his back.

As more and more fumes rose, Kaname staggered a few steps…

「Huh…?」

Not understanding what had just happened, Kaname turned and looked back.

「…」

G-3, remained silent. He had not moved a single step from where he stood.

It looked like Kaname had simply brushed passed G-3. But from the fingers of his metallic bullet-proof fiber gloves…

Plop! *Plop!*

…fell drops of blood.

「Ha Ha!… I…I was completely illogical…」

With a forced smile, Kaname turned towards me…

Her chest armour was split low in the middle. I saw that in her black skin-suit… there was a deep gash.

「Kaname!!」

I heard Aria scream behind me. I couldn't see anything… With his bare hands, G-3 had just opened a hole in Kaname's chest.

「Fourth. Are you going to waste what little life you have left?」

As G3 faced the other direction, Kaname replied…

「If it's a waste…」

As dark blood trickled from her mouth…

Shing!

Reaching both of her gauntleted hands inside her armour, Kaname drew two blades.

「…Then I'm going to waste it all!」

Again, Kaname launched herself at G-3 but…

Thud!

She was thrown right back more than ten meters. Totally shattering her blades, guards and all, the pieces scattered like glass.

I couldn't see that one either… G-3's attack.. it's too fast! It's impossible for the eye to follow…!

「…You're a fool, Fourth. I always knew that you were just weak.」

G-3 said in a low growl without turning back.

「Kaname!!」

The scene being too much for her to bear, finally able to stand Aria ran from behind me to Kaname, even though they had just been fighting. Then, Kaname having collapsed onto her back, Aria lifted the upper half of her body and cradled her in her arms.

Following her example and unable to think straight, I rushed to Kaname's side
ignoring G-3.

「Kaname…! Kaname…!」

Both of us holding her in our arms… Her face was covered in blood, and she was staring off into the distance.

「…Now I think… I know why… I wanted to be close to you… Onii-chan…」

She mumbled deliriously.

「I… wanted to believe… that I was*human*… so I was looking for a family… a human brother.」

「Kaname, don't speak! You're making the bleeding worse!」

Applying pressure with her hand to the wound in Kaname's chest, Aria was removing
the remnants of her destroyed armour.

「Now… I know the reason… why I defied Third too. More than Third's wishes… I wanted to protect you, Onii-chan」

「Kaname …!」

I also put pressure on the wound but… the blood won't stop!

I… can't help her!

「Ahaha… You didn't say it… today. Remember whenever I

called you ‘Onii-chan’… and every time you’d say … ‘You’re not my little sister’? You said it over and over… and each time I heard it… it hurt so much I really thought that I’d die, but… you didn’t say it today… 」

Running out of strength, Kaname was able to smile.

「 Kaname…! 」

Kaname.

Argh! Why didn’t I realise it until just now! By my denial, I was only hurting her. Why did I do that…?!

Mere regret could not conjure this emotion rising within me… It rose up from the bottom of my heart. My heart ached as if it were bleeding.

「 I am your sister… that will never change… so… I couldn’t show you how much I loved you. These feelings, I couldn’t let anyone know… so… I used them to give me strength to fight. Even against someone stronger than me–against Third… 」

As if to chide herself, Kaname gave another brief smile….

「 I’m…human…and your sister. By doing such illogical things… I became human. At the very end… 」

Tears fell from Kaname’s eyes, and from inside her armour… There had been some kind of charm, and it had fallen into the pool of blood. It’s *hideous*… It’s similar to the hand-stitched ‘Onii-chan Plush’ matching set that I have. It was a little smaller than the stitched ‘Kaname Plush’ she sowed for me… It was the hand-made felt Leopon-Chimera she had received from Aria and the girls after the Sports Festival.

「 Kaname… This isn’t the end. It’s not that bad! 」

Tears in her camellia-coloured eyes, Aria spoke words of comfort, and Kaname replied…

「 Aria, thank-you too… 」

Kaname said in voice that was barely a whisper.

「 Coming to this school, spending time with everyone everyday… even fighting… it wasn’t all bad. In the end though… I made a

complete mess of things… 」

「 Kaname…! 」

Kaname began to squint their eyes like she was sleepy… Finally, gathering what was left of her strength, she wrung out these words.

「 Third is… only a weapon… Onii-chan… please… don't fight… run away… 」

Kaname…!

Kaname's breathing had already become erratic, but I replied…

「 Kaname. I'm sorry, but I can't honour that request. 」

I said, loud and clear. Looking at her face, covered in blood, I continued.

「 There isn't a brother that can forgive someone who hurt his younger sister. 」

I told her that. Hearing those words… tears spilled from her narrowing eyelids…

Drop *Drop*

One after another they fell, mixing with the blood and running down her cheek.

「 Onii-chan… you told me not to cry… so I decided not to, but… 」

With a laugh and a small smile… As if the final thread had been cut, Kaname collapsed.

Kaname…

「 Kanameee…! 」

Hearing Aria's scream… I turned around and stood up. With his back still facing us… I glared at G-3

I understand…

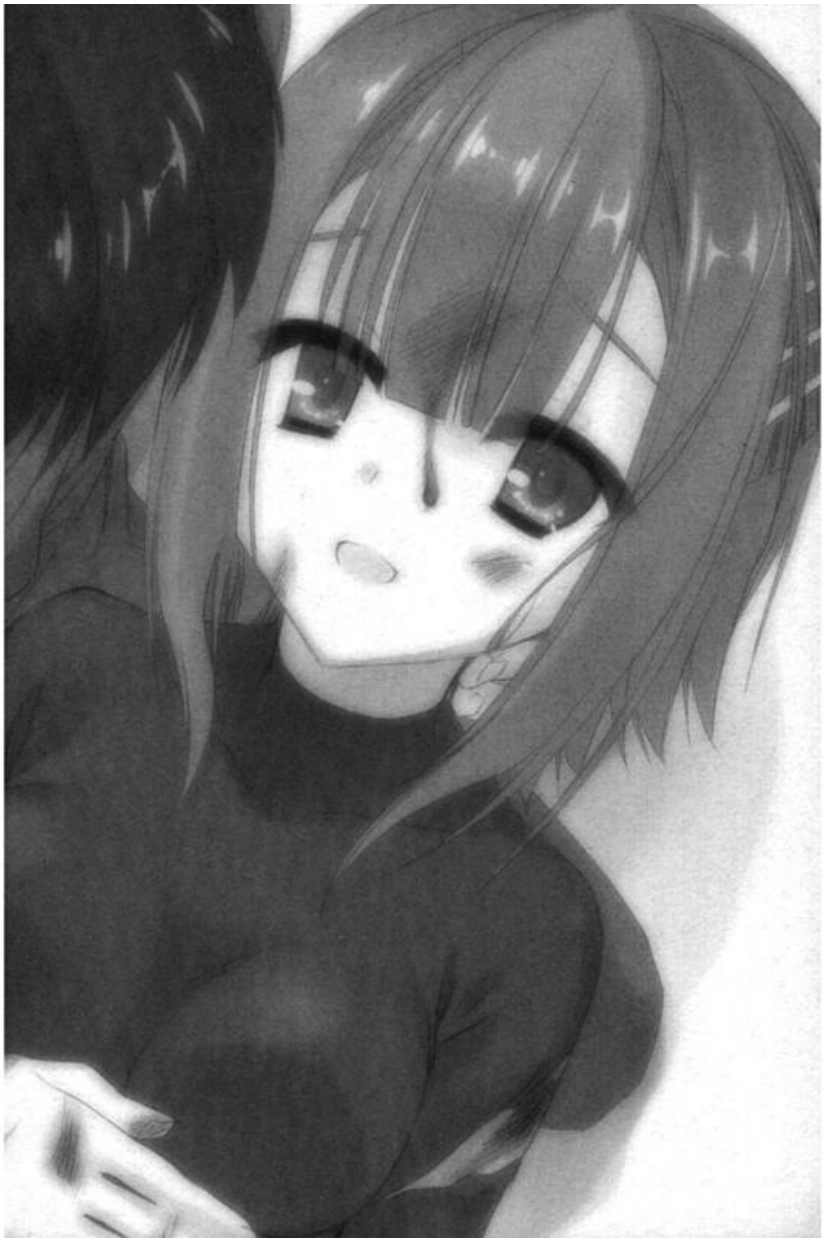
I feel a strange rush of blood to the inner core of my body, and realisation dawns. I'm different from my cowering self. A dangerous feeling was overflowing.

It was… Rage.

He had hurt Kaname, used her like he might use a hand or foot, and in the end, threw her away like some *thing*. Rage towards that man…

「…」

He had to have sensed my gaze.



Expressionless, G-3 turned his head to look back.

「Now do you know why I was waiting? For you to become *that*!」

What G-3 said… Although not completely, I understand. This boiling feeling… is some kind of Hysteria Mode. I'm becoming *hystericised*. It's similar to Berserker Hysteria Mode, but stronger. It feels vastly more powerful.

「Come, Kinji.」

Swish

With a flutter, G-3's coat flapped… Without a glance towards Kaname, G-3 walked towards the sea.

「Are you sure? Now that I've become "that", I'm *not* in the mood to be pleasant.」

Although I can't explain the details to Aria… right now the state of the current "me" is different from normal Hysteria Mode and is 1.7 times stronger than Berserker. It is obviously a more powerful level. And besides, my enemy is a man.

「Kinji…」

Still hugging Kaname, Aria looked up at me… Sensing this new, dangerous side of me… she watched with a puzzled expression.

Ah yes, I understand.

Now the current "me" has seen the whole picture and knows the reason my brother… and late father both just snapped sometimes, radiating a blood-lust that was impossible to ignore.

「I-I also…」

That she would also fight was what Aria was trying to say, but I held her back with a glance.

「I'll take care of it. It's revenge for my sister.」

「…*Gasp*…」

Looking at me like as if I had become a different person, Aria was speechless. Then, she tried to say something…. but since she was

unable to, instead…

「Kinji…」

「…」

Without answering, I turned my back toward Aria…

「Don't die. Please…」

She said, imploring me in a tremulous voice. Doing so, Aria seems very feminine.

****

1. In order to better absorb the nutrients in food, there is an increase of blood flow to the digestive system after one eats. While it doesn't totally deplete the rest of the body of blood supply, some medical researchers believe that it can lead to fatigue.

2. Acronym for 'Head-Mounted Display'. Kaname's augmented reality goggles.

3. Shikigami are invoked or conjured spirits that are said to serve the conjurer in various ways– mainly in tracking and surveillance.

General Note: Tamamo speaks an archaic Japanese. If rendered literally, it would make no sense, so I'll throw in a couple of 'thee's', 'thou's', and the like to indicate this.

4. Gauntlets that Kinji had specially made to deflect bullets with his hands.

5. Jeanne is talking about military-grade hardware that usually has a dedicated laser or satellite connection and a throat-mic for stealth.

6. Lit. "Proclamation" or "Declaration" in Italian. A traditional meeting between two opposing factions. It reads as something like "War Council" in Kanji. It was the meeting in Volume 8 where the factions 'Deen' and 'Grenada' were decided for Far Eastern Warfare.

7. 'Single Lighting Ring/Band Slice' in Kanji.

8.Yes it actually says this. The literal kanji say 'blade of light', and Star Wars is referenced, so the parallel is obviously meant to be drawn.

9. The author is referencing a children's game, 'Jintori/Jindori', which is similar to capture-the-flag. In order to win, you have to occupy/capture the 'base' of opposing team while keeping the other team out of your own. Reki is covering her 'base' on Academy Island, and attacking G-3 in Shinagawa.

10. Lit. 'Five Colour Bridge'.

11. Lit. 'Great South Harbour Bridge.'

12. 'To gain knowledge' or 'to reason' in Latin. 'Predictive Reasoning', in Kanji– specifically carrying the meaning 'precognition by means of logical reasoning'.

13. A mis-spelling of 'Bartitsu', immortalised by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his Sherlock Holmes stories. It was the martial art form Holmes used.

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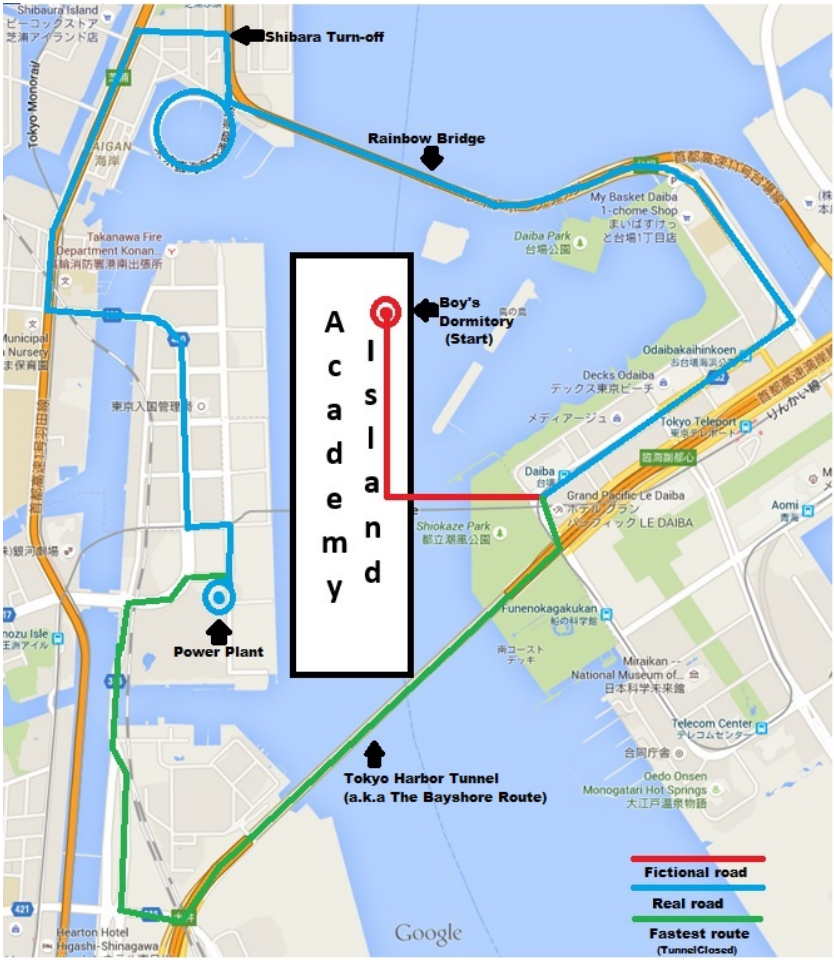
Map of Kinji and Watson's Route



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Full Credit and much thanks to the Staff of Twin Dragons Light Novels: **Thunder**, **Darkhellsing**, and **Esteban108**, for permission to use their translation.

Chapter Four.

G-3 was walking on top of the sea once more. Beneath his feet… As I drew closer, I finally understood.

Some kind of bridge, transparent like glass, was laid across the waves. It seemed like an optical illusion to the eye, but the bridge was real and tangible.

I began to cross it. Taking a few steps forward, I felt the ground beneath my feet change and found it quite stable.

This is almost like the deck… of an invisible ship?… that I found my self standing on.

「Oi, Kinji. That's 'Hysteria King Mode'… It comes from entering 'Berserker mode' many times.」

Turning around towards me, G-3 announced in a low voice.

King?

「From our observations, it's similar to a situation where male animals form a herd with a lot of females. 'King's HSS'… It manifests when the male's women are destroyed.」

「…That's why you did it! The same thing. Twice.」

It was only the Baskerville girls that were attacked a few days ago at the Shinagawa Geofront… and then here again today. In both cases he hurt girls I had a relationship with, one after the other.

That's why he did this

「That's right Kinji! This was all for *your* benefit! Ha ha ha!」

Pointing to the mainland that had been turned into a war-zone, G-3 was sneering at me. Caught up in this provocation, I wanted to attack immediately but… I didn't.

The increased blood flow of Hysteria Mode was coursing through my head, but…

G-3's attack on Kaname just now…

I couldn't even guess his real motive.

G-3 is hiding something. A lot of things. But I'll let someone else figure it out later. Everything he's done so far has been a lie, anyway.

「Historically, it's been assumed that this is the strongest form of HSS. However, the exact details are vague, and I don't fully understand them. According to our estimates from the US Army, the acceleration of the central nervous system activity is about… 30 times 1.2, so that would be about 36 times, right?」

Craning his head, G-3 turned to look at me. Something about his words are strange. If their numbers are accurate, that would mean 'Beserker' is actually stronger. Interrupting my calculations…

「Please stop, Third-sama.」

After a slight buzzing noise, the figure of a person wearing something like a raincoat materialised next to G-3.

There wasn't anyone there a moment ago, and he filled the empty space suddenly. And not just him. Around us, a group of two… plus three more people wearing the same kind of coat now were standing there. I was surrounded before I knew what had happened! Checking his surroundings first, G-3 quipped:

「Hey, Kinji. That isn't the first time you've seen 'Photo-refractive Camouflage'[1], is it? The *Galleon* also uses it.」

With a loud *thunk*, he stomped on the invisible deck of the ship.

「The day is unpropitious. To join battle with that kind of strange man is something we should not do.」

Beside G-3, the speaker removed what looked like a hood. A young boy, or maybe it was a beautiful young girl–I couldn't tell which–spoke.

Ah…

On his head, like Tamamo… he had a pair of pointed Kitsune ears . Although I don't know a lot about non-humans, it seems that G-3 has an ally of the same race as Tamamo.

「Superstitious as ever, eh, Tsukumo?」

Apparently his name was ‘Tsukumo’, and patting him on the head, G-3 said…

「All of you, get back to the Yokosuka base. Be on 24-hour alert.」

He gave his orders to the people surrounding us. The group surrounding us were… a motley crew–to say the least.

There was a white-haired man with surgical scars on his head and neck.

With a bullet scar on his cheek, filling the role of strongman, was burly Caucasian man stood over two meters tall.

With bandages wrapped around his head, covering almost half his face– a tall, thin dark-skinned man.

With mismatching eye colours, a silver-haired young girl.

And the man who drove us in a Hummer from the Shinagawa Geofront to Butei High the other day, the old man Angus is also here.

So they’re all under G-3’s command, huh?

All of them… are radiating an aura that tells me that these are no ordinary people. Although not G-3’s level, each of them probably possess a considerable amount of battle power. Except the girl and old Angus, of course.

「You musn’t! You musn’t!!!」

Apparently worried about G-3 , Tsukumo desperately pleaded.

「*I’m* going to put Kinji to the test. Didn’t we already go over this? Man up, Tsukumo!」

「I am a woman!」

With a sigh, Tsukumo shook her bristling chestnut-brown hair, and following…

「But in the unlikely event that you were hurt…」

「There is no need for you to stoop to perform such a task… 」

「Allow me do it…」

G-3's underlings clamoured.

「Hey, you lot! Are you insinuating that I might lose?!」

A razor-sharp glint in his eye, G-3 roared with an eardrum splitting roar. Hearing his voice…

Whoosh

In unison, all of his subordinates, in that instant, hurriedly snapped to attention. Even Tsukumo, who was panicking just moment ago stood with her hand in salute. This concern for G-3, and their response to his leadership that I witnessed… It seems that all of those under his command are extremely loyal to him.

And as I maintained a constant state of vigilance…

They all saluted G-3 and crossed the deck in order disembark to the mainland. Last of all, Tsukumo stubbornly remained, and turning her tail towards me… departed. Now, only G-3 and I are standing here.

「Book of Sirach, chapter 42, verse 19: "He declareth the things that are past, and for-to come, and revealeth the steps of hidden things."[2] I don't want either of you to have any regrets. For your own sakes.」

Hearing Kana's voice from on top of the crane, I turned to look that way but when I turned to look that way… she was gone. Although I didn't understand grasp the full meaning of her words, but apparently she didn't really intend to help anyone.

It doesn't matter.

Don't let anyone else interfere. I'll defeat him myself.

「Come, Kinji.」

G-3 turned his back toward me and fiddled with something near his feet as he kicked if. A manhole access appeared nearby, leading inside… and inside a ladder protruded from the opening, going down beneath the water's surface.

You want me to 'come'? Inside this vehicle…

That's fine. He wants to get me alone and then work me over. That way there will be greater psychological damage.

I followed him through the hole in the illusion, and after entering the ship began to rumble and started moving.　My HSS kicked in, and I understand the situation.　From the inertia I could tell that we weren't moving forward, back, left, or right… Up?

Since he had already closed the entry hatch and there wasn't a window, I couldn't check visually, but… We are definitely rising. Not soundlessly, but very quietly.

So it's a seaplane…

And it's also a VTOL (Vertical Take-off and Landing). They had landed between the Thermal Power Station and the natural gas tanker… probably because they were stealing fuel.

The long hallway inside the plane was lit by LEDs. It is a large vehicle. From the sound of water passing underneath the body of the plane… it is about 20 metres long and upwards of 50 metres wide.
Its profile… is a 'flying wing'.

It is shaped like a giant boomerang, utilising only the main wing to fly. A giant version of Nazi Germany's Horten Ho229… No… something else…

Rather the American B-2 Spirit bomber. Fitting every definition of the word 'stealth plane', this plane and the B-2 are as alike as two peas in a pod. As I combat-loaded[3] the bullets I had been carrying…

「So this is one of the US military's toys.」

I said, probing. And..

「It's a next-gen stealth aircraft prototype. Its code-name is *'Galleon'*— the most undetectable aircraft in the world. Although, because of the production costs it can't be mass produced. Ah, relax. No pilot or anyone else that could interfere is aboard. We're flying a pre-selected path on autopilot.」

G-3 replied calmly, as if he were chatting with a friend.

'Galleon'.

This… is not the first time that I have heard that name. At the Shinagawa Geofront G-3's subordinate, the old man Angus, mentioned it.

「It's incredibly quiet for a VTOL!」

「How many times are you going to be surprised seeing the same thing! Just like P-FIBER, this aircraft uses a 'Dean drive'[4].」

P-FIBER.

The same as what Kaname was using– those 'flying blades'… Those cutting edge scientific weapons spring to mind. Moreover, it possesses optical stealth technology that makes it completely invisible in daylight. I think the fact that it is undetectable by radar goes without saying. Surely, this aircraft is the epitome of *Neue Ange*.

****

At that moment…

「We are a little overweight.」

For some reason, saying that out loud so that I could hear, G-3 kicked opened one of the doors inside the plane.

「Yes, we are overweight.」

「Why did you say it twice?」

「Shaddup!」

Inside the room he had just entered… Disorderly piles of banknotes were stacked in plastic bags. Shouting 'Hey!', G-3 opened a hatch on the floor. As if it were an air-raid, G-3 scattered the money, throwing it out of the plane.

Looking through the hatch myself, I saw that the Galleon had already risen 50 metres off the ground, and G-3's anxious followers gazing up as bundles of notes rained down upon them. Then G-3 dropped a box with a picture of of gold ingots, and it hit Tsukumo on the head, knocking her over and causing G-3 to laugh.

「Alright, now we're light.」

He said aloud again. And while turning his gaze away from where I stood bewildered… he returned to the hall.

Following him into the aircraft bay which originally held the Cluster Bombs, compact B-61 Thermonuclear Warheads, or

modified JDAM Bombs, but now it was filled with…

Paintings…?

Realistic religious imagery, Impressionist and Cubist colour oil paintings,; avant-garde contemporary modern art, and many other kinds of art adorned the room. Pierrot Dolls in gaudy clothing and huge speakers scattered here and there throughout the room. It looked like an art gallery… no, like an art gallery and audio room combined.

「What is this place? It's not an armory; it's a junk closet!」

「What do you think of this, Kinji. This is a Pablo Picasso.」

And saying that, G-3 hooked his thumb indicating one of the paintings.

And G-3… What this?

The blood-thirst radiating from him had been strong from the beginning… but since we entered this room it's become stronger.

「Is that… Hysteria Mode?」

I accidentally gasped aloud, and G-3 smiled and laughed .

「Ah, so *that's* your name for HSS.」

He hasn't denied it.

Thinking back to Kaname's old name–G-4–, that name shows some kind of relation between them, and I vaguely expected that this guy has Hysteria Mode. He's using it right now.

But… There isn't a trigger here…?

With that realisation, I searched for a female figure amidst the art, but…

「Not that, Kinji. For a number of reasons in my past, women don't do anything for me.」

While scratching the back of his head, G-3 said redundantly.

「So, how did you do it?.」

「You know what they say: ‘The brain is like a black box’, right, Kinji?」

G-3 laughed, as with each passing second, the aura of his Hysteria Mode grew stronger.

「The trigger for HSS is β endorphins. There isn’t only one way to produce them.」

Boom!

A loud noise echoed through the body of the plane, sending vibrations through the hold–music being blasted at full volume. It was electronically generated music with vocals. It part of the recent musical craze that everyone is listening to. Reki listens to it too; it’s ‘Ibiza Trance’[5]. Filling the room, the music instantly transformed it into a dance club atmosphere.

「In my case, Kinji. *Beauty*–being moved by Art causes a rush of β endorphins. Whether an object or sound, until it bores me, I can use it as a trigger.」

I listened… and I couldn’t even smile at G-3 explanation.

Although I have very little interest in such things, a long time ago I read about it on the internet. The reason some men and women go to clubs, art galleries, the cinema, and the like together… Is to use music and the fine arts to enter a mental state of rapture similar to the trance-like ecstasy of sexual arousal.

Is he intentionally using them to induce Hysteria Mode? If I had to say, it has to be some kind of Pictophillia or Agalmatophillia.[6]

Well, when you limit the context to hysteria talking mode, something kinky like that would be handy in gaining a victory. It certainly gives him a wide degree of freedom broader than Kana or Vlad. With the feeling that he was baring his white teeth like fangs… G-3 pulled out a small box.

「Normally, it would be enough for someone to simply set foot in here, but against you I have to use this trick.」

He pulled a piece of square red paper about 1 cm large from the box, and put it inside his mouth.

「What was that?」

「This is the product of the most cutting-edge technology: Neurotransmitter accelerating cocktail. It would scare you to find out what is in it. Los Alamos stopped using it when they discovered that it could lead to death.」

Radiating from him… his blood-thirst… reaching another level, increased even more.

Vlad, my older brother Kinichi, Sherlock … Compared to Hysteria Mode user I have fought so far, he is perhaps the most formidable enemy. I have the feeling of being locked in the same room as a magical monster.

But my Hysteria Mode is very different also. Using this new King Mode… or "King's HSS"– whatever you call it–, I will defeat him.

「I think that's enough talk. Come on up, mate.」

And after saying that, G-3 started up an interior spiral staircase. The stairs led to a small hatch in the ceiling that he opened… leading outside… to the top of the aeroplane.

Apparently G-3 wants wanted to continue the fight on top of the wings, and exiting through the hatch… The sun has set, and the moon shines white through the gaps in the the clouds. As for the weather… there are scattered clouds.

Because of my current state, I can *vaguely* make out the *Galleon's* shape. As I deduced from the sound, is *exactly* like the B-2 Spirit bomber, but the composite materials are completely different. The surface of the aeroplane is like a ultra high-definition display, and a view of the Tokyo nightscape below us is being displayed as night camouflage.

Photo-refractive Camouflage… able to become all but invisible and copy any colour and pattern.

Looking like some kind of flying chameleon, judging by the pitch and yaw of the aeroplane and what I can see of its ailerons and wings, the *Galleon* is flying in a gentle arc and we are apparently ascending in order to rise above the clouds. Our current altitude is about 400 meters. We are cruising comfortably, at a speed of approximately 100 km/h.

To develop large aeroplane that can fly stably at such a low speed– as expected of America! Moreover, it is almost completely silent. I

suppose that it's an aeroplane that differs in traditional flight mechanics, implementing a combination propulsion system that limits the use of jet engines. I don't see any contrails either. It probably uses a system with some drying chemical, the same way the B-2 does.

Standing near the nose, 20 metres away, G-3…

「This place is large enough, isn't it?」

Turning towards me, G-3 raised his arms, spreading them to indicate the entire sky. Paying attention to the air flow, I could tell that the slightly inclined surface of the wings has leveled out. If I were somehow caught up in the swirling vortex of air generated by the wings, I would be instantly sucked in by the vacuum of air.

「No, It's me and you. Even the sky is too small. It's time for your exit, G-3.[7]」

That was… a Hysteria Mode induced response. It surprised even me. This means that the blood flow from the core of my body has already been circulated throughout my entire body. But before I fight, I want to confirm something. When he did that…

「…By the way, you're really kind. I didn't expect that..」

Hearing my remark, G-3 pursed his eyebrows with a roared 「Whaaat?!」.

「You let her escape, didn't you? Kaname, that is. You didn't kill her.」

And with that, I cut straight to the heart of the matter…

G-3 remained silent and only glared at me. It was not a denial. As I had thought, my guess was correct.

「After I went into Hysteria Mode I started thinking back, and in the middle of my recollection, I finally understood. Your attack inflicted an injury that was just shy of fatal. Besides that, Watson was there, and Kana who also holds a medical licence. Kaname has a 100-to-1 chance survival.」

「…」

「From Kaname's words and behavior, you deduced that true effect

Hysteria Mode has on women. Because of that, you concluded that she would be a loose cannon in your operation, and decided to exclude her from your organisation. By inflicting pain and mental shock upon Kaname, you wanted to foster rebellion while destroying her loyalty to you.」

With the superior mental powers of Hysteria Mode… in the care G-3 took for Kaname, the image of Reki's attempted suicide in Tokyo Station is being superimposed onto this scene as I remember it.

「Life is worthless if not devoted to our leader.」

–Such loyalty will last a lifetime unless a sufficient psychological shock is experienced. Since her attempted suicide, Reki has stopped listening to the illusory 「Orders of the Wind」, but with Kaname feelings, something more was needed… They could only be separated if he killed her himself.

「It wasn't just Kaname's loyalty you had to worry about, but it had to hold up to to all outside observation, didn't it? It had to appear as real as possible. Overall, your acting was quite superb, and the channeling of blood-lust into your attack was flawless .」

「…You can think whatever you want.」

He said as he interrupted me, but under his HMD, his face… was red.

As I thought, I've hit the mark. And his secret exposed, G-3 is embarrassed. Which isn't like him at all.

「There's one more thing I want to say. Is that alright, G-3 ?」

「…What?」

「You're not absolutely sure that you can win.」

「That's crazy-talk.」

「That is why you chased your comrades away–to avoid exposing them to danger. And so they could continue to make a living for themselves, even if they lost you–the one they call their leader–, you handed over all the money.」

A little while ago, G-3 threw that cash to his subordinates– that's

how it was. All of these deductions were able to be made thanks to Hysteria Mode but… Somehow, I can well understand his actions. They are the same as those he took toward Kaname.

「There's been a huge misunderstanding, Kinji. I w-…」

A little flustered, G-3 tried to deny it, but I continued…

「Relax. No one else figured out your true intentions. Except me, of course.」

Waiting for the right time, I spoke and interrupted him. Hiding his true feelings and having them guessed so straightforwardly, G-3… He paused for a moment, and seemed to consider how to deny it, but it looks that he couldn't come up with anything. He could only turn red and stand there, gawping…

What is this? I've only just come to understand his personality. In short– he's Tsundere– as Riko would say. One the surface he looks like a tyrant, but he actually has a kind personality. In fact you could say he is soft-hearted.

Scowling at me, his feelings were revealed, and he crossed his arms.

「Great guess! But… there's one thing that your way off on. I didn't chase them away because you might win– there's no way you will kill me.」

「So, why then?」

「My body. It won't last much longer. It's like Fourth's.」

「…What?」

「It goes without saying that while you're living, laughing, and enjoying life, you could die at any moment. But for us… we have a 'Life Limiter' that Los Alamos built into our DNA to prevent treason. It's some kind of compound known only to them, and if we don't take it regularly, we can't live in the long-term. That's how it is with the Genion.」

G-3 said, as if he were talking about someone else's problem.

「In Fourth's case, its a kind of Furano polymer and we have confirmed that the polymer compound found in soft candies is a good enough substitute. But my 'Life Limiter' is still unidentified.」

So… that's it, huh? The reason Kaname was always, without fail, eating some kind of sweet.

What… cruel words ! Disgust is building up inside of me–Hatred for Los Alamos!

「Well, then…. When we're above the clouds and out of reach, whether they are exploding bullets, incendiary bullets, blinding bullets or whatever, they won't be seen from below. Use them all you want. Oh, yeah, one more thing…」

Slowly clearing the cumulus clouds, the *Galleon* rose… G-3 looked up into the dark azure night sky dark blue, and in defiance of his previous words, put on a bold smile.

「You did it Kinji! You're a celebrity too!」

「Celebrity?」

「This battle is being watched by the U.S. Military's KH-14 spy satellite[8].」

「Seriously?」

「Neue Ange is developed there. They want to collect all the information they can on 'human weapons'. That includes my battle with you. Whoops! It's too late to hide that stupid look on your face. Misty's state-of-the-art Enhanced Imaging System technology is able to analyse a single square centimeter of area.」

Americans… You have to be insane.

「Huh…」

I turned toward the starry sky, and in their direction… showed then my raised middle finger. G-3 barked and exploded into laughed

「HA HA HA…! Now I see… So that's it.」

「What's 'it'?」

「Well… During your battle with Sherlock on IU, I heard that he was laughing. It puzzled me, but now I get it. You're an idiot. But you're funny. I'm sure of it now.」

'During my battle with Sherlock on IU'… How does he know about that? And in such detail?

「You have an impressive information network. Are you sure you're my fan?」

「Don't say such disgusting things. Rather, Butei Officer Kinji Tohyama, are you sure you want to do this?」

「Do what?」

「Fight me. You are E-Rank, I am R-Rank. It's obvious what the result will be.」

「The 'R' comes long after the 'E' in the alphabet.」

I replied while drawing my Desert Eagle in response. G-3 , laughed again and…

Clang!

From the armour storage on his right leg, he drew a gun.

A Heckler & Koch USP Match model[9].

That would be a gun I would not like to fight against. It's power comes from the calibre, and it's accuracy is high. The gun has a rail fitting at the bottom of the frame and is equipped with an integrated recoil compensator. The magazine is double column and the number of bullets it can carry is greater. But still…

「I thought that you'd pull out a ray gun, but here you are packing a regular gun.」

「Because this isn't my main weapon. Just a toy, to rock you to sleep.」

Then from the armour on his back, G-3 also drew a large, heaving looking knife. However, it doesn't look like the Neue Ange that Kaname used. It was made of the same cemented carbide material as the Orochi gloves I was wearing and looked like a normal tactical knife. As a result, G-3 and I… interestingly enough, both of us had a gun and knife. Evaluating our situation and opponent, we reached the same conclusion–without any kind of mutual agreement.

「We think alike, eh, Kinji?」

「Despite ourselves, so it would seem.」

「There's something I want you to show me first. What you call:

‘Billiards’. 」

「Seriously… You know a lot about me. And my fight with Sherlock. 」

「Before Bandire, I bought the information from the leader of I.U.’s remnant war party, Ignatius Nomad. Because I had a grudge with you. 」

「A grudge…? 」

「The subjegation of Sherlock, and the extermination of I.U…. That was *my* job, and you just up and snatched it. Do you know, Kinji? In the US, stealing another person’s job is a crime. 」

「In Japan we call that ‘hatred born of a misunderstanding’. Nevertheless, the outcome was unfortunate. I regret stealing another’s prey. 」

And with a sigh,

Click!

I cocked my Desert Eagle.

The Desert Eagle is both a double and single-action gun. In combat all one has to do is pull the trigger and it will shoot in semi-auto double-action mode, but by manually cocking the hammer, a trigger pull is limited to firing a in single-action mode. In single action, it takes less force and time to pull the trigger and is suited to making more accurate shots.

Accurate shooting…

In other words, as an apology for stealing his prey, I’ll indulge his request.

I will repel his bullets with mine, using ‘Billiards’ .

Seemingly understanding, G-3 smile and laughed.

「Good Kinji! That’s a good fellow. But how are you going to do it? My USP holds 13 bullets. Your DE has 8. You can’t deal with all of them… 」

「…I’ll manage somehow 」

As we talked…

Rising to an altitude of almost 600 meters, we locked eyes as we stood atop the *Galleon's* wings.

「Should we start? Both of us… only came here to fight!」

His USP set on Full-Auto, and the muzzle-flashes blurring into one… 13 identical .45 ACP calibre bullets bore down on me.

…Perfect.

Per your request, I'll show you… 'Billiards'..! Using only that technique, I will meet your attack with with my DE.

Cannon![10].

Bang! *Bang!* *Bang!* *Bang!* *Bang!* *Bang!*

Our bullets sparked as they intercepted each other between us. All of them scattered in every directions, and the smoke that issued from the barrel of our guns drifted over the back of the plane.

「…!」

Half surprised, G-3 bore a happy expression.

「…」

Silently, I was standing… unharmed.

How to repel 13 bullets with only 8?

That's simple.

Just like a 'Cannon Shot' in the real game of Billiards, I used 1 of my bullets to strike upwards of 2 of my opponent's, diverting their angle. Of course, if I hit my opponent's bullets, my own bullet's trajectory will change, and I calculated that beforehand. In short, this is a *'2-Chain Billiards'*.

Of the 8 bullets, I used 5 of them that way, and 8 + 5, gives a total of 13 bullets I was able to block. Normally this would be impossible, but with this Hysteria Mode– in King Mode–, I can chain up to 4 or 5 shots with one shot. So shoot 30 or 50 bullets at me. You'll only be wasting ammunition, G-3 .

Then…

A startlingly important distinction suddenly occurred to me.

…I've got it! The reason this Hysteria King Mode is so powerful…

I was able to preform a self-analysis on the *'Cannon'* I did, and right now, the neurotransmitter levels coursing through my brain… is approximately 75 times the normal amount. That would be 2.5 times the strength of normal Hysteria Mode. I calculated regressively from the experience.

Then I understood.

G-3 had said that King Mode increases normal Hysteria mode by 1.2 times. That's most likely correct. But there's more to it.

…King Mode works exponentially…

Shirayuki, Jeanne, Riko, Aria and Kaname, they were defeated in front of me, one after another…

Apparently I recognised them as 'part of my herd' and King Mode was manifested *5 times over.* That's 1.2 times raised to the fifth power–approximately 2.5 times. If the effect of normal Hysteria Mode is 30 times, it yields a result of 75 times normal acceleration. This number fits perfectly with my experience.

G-3… doesn't know that it works this way.

He only knows that it will manifest if he hurts several women… but he doesn't have a full understanding of King Mode. And when a human being doesn't understand something properly, they don't know how to deal with it correctly.

「Done already, G-3 ?」

My mind is… cool and collected.

King Mode is different than Berserker. It is a form of Hysteria Mode with silent rage. With what I have now… I can win.

G-3 twirled his large knife once in his hand and closed in menacingly.

So that's how you want to play? Fine…

While drawing my DE from it's holster, I opened my butterfly knife and… his black and gold coat flapping in the wind, crashed into him.

With a loud *Clang* our knives crossed creating a shower of sparks, and my arm started feeling strange, so I tried to check on it. In the blink of an eye, G-3 had changed grip on his gun and using it as a blunt object, struck my left shoulder.

With a *Crack!* A strange noise issued from my body.

My left shoulder… has been dislocated. With a strong shove of his knife, he forced me back and… caught up in the air currents swirling around the wings, I slipped backwards.

…!

In that instant, I tried to regain balance and hold my ground; but thanks to the Photo-refractive Camouflage, I missed the edge of the wing and stepped into empty space. So that was his plan when he pushed me.

We're above the clouds. Our altitude is about 800 meters. We're higher than when I fought Hilda at the SkyTree, so… I'll fall. Is that it? …Of course not. Come on Kinji!

Bam!

I tried to think of a way to survive, and in almost the very same instant I shot my Beretta. With my right hand index finger in the trigger guard, the rest of my fingers clutched a luminous blue material. It was the test sample that Hiraga-san had given me a few days ago– *Anchor* [11].

From the barrel of the gun to the point of impact, a modified bullet stretched out a diphase liquid Aramid cable.

Knowing that we were going to be on a plane, it looks like I made the right decision when I loaded my gun.

The tip of the wire stretched out and fixed itself to the underside of the *Galleon*, optically camouflaged with the night sky. Grasping the blue-green luminous object, I found that it had become the tail-end of a wire suspended mid-air. Now a line has been stretched between the *Galleon* and my hand.

Using it like a trapeze, I swung toward the front of the *Galleon* with a pendulum motion. In King-Mode… I can see the eddies of the air currents moving around the the wings of the aircraft. It's only a matter of concentration. I boarded the plane using the air currents swirling around the nose, and looking back, my gaze met G-3's.

And then …

Bam!

Still being carried by air currents, I landed *on my left shoulder* on the right wing of the *Galleon*, and a *Crunch* could be heard coming from my body.

「Gahahaha! That must have hurt!」

Appreciating what I had just done, G-3 clapped happily on the left wing of the plane. What I just did was relocate a dislocated joint in the middle of a battle.

The Tohyama Family technique of falling from a horse to relocate a joint has been passed down for generation, though my older brother taught me to use it falling from a car, I'm pretty sure that I'm the first to use it on a stealth bomber.

Ouch… I knew this would hurt.

I narrowed my eyebrows slightly. It wasn't my shoulder that hurt. I'm used to pain from my days in ASSAULT. My head hurt, and the pain radiated from my spine. Probably a side-effect of Hysteria King-Mode.

The manifestation of a 75 times acceleration of normal the brain and the body's nervous system isn't maintainable. If this Hysteria Mode got any stronger, it would probably cause a total physical breakdown.

「Looks like you had a good anchor cable, Kinji.」

「It came from here at Butei High. The inventor of the Japanese version of Neue Ange.」

As we reached the flowing clouds… from several places on the wing, black smoke was going up and threaded its way toward the back of the plane. It seems that some of our stray bullets have damaged the aeroplane.

How fragile is this thing! They had so much confidence that it would never be detected, so it has no armour.

「Shall we continue?」

As the *Galleon* broke through the top of the clouds, I turned to face G-3… Narrowing my focus to a single target besides his left arm, I began to think about how I could decisively end this battle with one trump attack. I guess he realised where I was looking, because G-3 held up his left arm and motioned for me to stop.

「 Before that, Kinji. With your first *Billiard* attack you didn't need to hold back so much!」

With keen insight, he penetrated to the truth.

「…That's an artificial arm, right?」

From the start, I had a slightly uncomfortable feeling, but… only just when he struck me could I confirm it. From his left shoulder down he does not have a natural arm. Instead, there is a high fidelity Bio-electric prosthesis. Receiving faint nerve signals allows him to move it at will. At a glance, it is indistinguishable from a real arm.

「I don't want your stupid pity! That really pisses me off so much, I'm going to rip your arm off. Learn to read the room, you insensitive bastard!」

That sounds like something Aria says a lot. You Tsunderes may say that; but if you have something to tell me, just open up your mouth and say it! My intuition is terrible, and I'm not an ESPer like Tokitou-senpai.

「Don't you think it would be better if we stopped?」

Even as I thought it was pointless, I heard his answer.

「This King-mode… it far exceeds all other Hysteria Mode variants. As I am now, I am a like child when put next to you. You must see the huge gap between us. An elite Butei should be able to distinguish the difference in fighting power between his enemy and himself.」

「…」

「I am a Japanese Butei. I don't want to kill you in order to win but… but it might happen if you make a stupid move. Didn't you say that the time remaining in your life was short? Don't waste it here.」

「Ha! If it's a waste, then come on and waste it!」

G-3 answered, his breath… coming out white like a snowy mountain. Mine was also. Our current height probably approaching 1000 meters. How far do you plan to ascend? If we assume that the ground temperature is 8 ° C, the temperature of this place should be 1.5 ° C. Oxygen concentration has also dropped by 12%. There's also the ongoing damage to my nervous system due to Hysteria King-Mode, and considering the speed with which we are ascending… If I can't end this quickly, all of these things become dangerous in several ways.

「What should we do? If we keep going like this, we'll end up in outer space, Brother.」

His long coat–which was apparently thermo-regulated– flapping in the wind, G-3 asked, sneering at my school uniform.

「Before that we're going to make a splashdown landing. And besides,we're not brothers. Kaname says the same thing.」

As we re-entered the clouds, a dense fog of water vapour surrounded the plane…

「 You don't get it? Your investigative skills suck, Kinji.」

G-3 answered in disgust and… *rub* *rub* wiped his face… He is removing his face paint.

Suddenly, the Galleon broke through the clouds into clear sky, and illuminated by moonlight, he stood on top of the plane wing…

…*?!*

Once G 3 removed his HMD, his face could be seen clearly visible. Until now obscured by his HMD and facepaint, his unpainted face was now seen…

That face … It looks like… It definitely looks like… me…!

It doesn't reach the level of twins, but rather the likeness between

brothers. It is not a disguise. With King-mode's enhanced visual perception, I know that. That is his natural face.

「I'm you, Kinji.」

His long bangs flapping wildly in the wind, G-3 let out a laugh.

「How… do you..?」

「Konza Tohyama. Nationality: Japanese . Former-Armed Prosecutor under the direct supervision of the Minister of Justice. Intelligence, physical training–on the whole: Excellent. Special Skills: What is known as HSS. His favourite game: Shougi, wasn't it?」

G-3…Why do you…

「In 1989,he was ranked #8 in the S.D.A.[12] It was then that the US Department of Defence put him on a list of people that it was key not to antagonise.」

It is… my father's profile that he's reciting. Including both public and private information.

「When Los Alamos saw the list, he had been assigned the code-name "Golden Cross[13]"–abbreviated ' G '– and a top secret military development project… managed to successfully obtain a tissue sample.」

「…!」

「Hey Kinji, your face changed colour. Didn't you know this? That's right, your old man's genes were selected as the most important chromosomes, and combining them with other other superior genetic specimens already collected… the final products of myself and Fourth were created. You couldn't even dig up *that* much?」

The other day, in the art room, Watson had said something about that…

Genions were artificially created in an American Research Facility as part of scientific experiments. It wasn't only how they were raised, but it went so far as science having a hand in their lives up to and including conception. Well, such a thing isn't strange in and of itself, and it's not particularly rare in the world but something like this… it goes too far. Creating a super-human this way in order

to militarise them and using used my father's DNA without his permission…!

「I have inherited 50% of Konza Tohyama's genes with a strong genetic dominance as the third of the G-Series. However, in the Genion Series, any children born to your father and mother would inherit the greatest percentage of genes, and numbers in the sequence were skipped because of the children already born. Tohyama Konza already had an eldest son and their second son– you– was already on the way. That's why I was called Third. In fact, it seems like you and I were born at about the same time.」

「So then… was it you… or me… that was born first?」

「Who cares which way it was? Whichever way it is, you can't change the fact that we are related by blood.」

"Related by blood."

"The G-bloodline".

Those are the words G-3 used a while ago… G–i.e., inheritance of my father's genes, in Kana, myself, G-3, and Kaname… In that case, it means that, together, the four of us are all genetic siblings. And it also means that by calling me *"Onii-chan"*… Kaname wasn't wrong. Meanwhile, as I stared in blank astonishment…

「Alright, brother. Until now, I've just been biding my time. Now I know your acceleration factor is… somewhere about 75 times, right? That is amazing but… with an acceleration of 100 times, I would easily be able to crush you. Although I've gone beyond 60 times…I'll do it!!!」

Settling his HMD back on his head, G-3 put another small, red piece of paper into his mouth… Two… Three, even.

Those are his neurotransmitter accelerates… The drug he uses in order to strengthen his Hysteria Mode.

100 times…?!

Are you planning to boost the effects of Hysteria Mode to an acceleration of 100 times with this drug? Don't do that! Except for the neo-cortex, Hysteria Mode puts a huge strain on the whole body's nervous system. Even fighting at an acceleration of 75 times, I've reached my breaking point limit and can hardly stand it …

An 100-fold acceleration could cost you your life…!

Like a drug-user, G-3 closed his eyes, and with a *crack*, twisted his neck to one side …

「The world is … 」

Contrary to my expectation, his voice was calm and even–the kind of voice that would make you believe that it was a superhuman speaking– and he began his speech,

「… caught up in the trend towards regulated disarmament. In the midst of such circumstances, there will be those who will try to develop all kinds of super-weapons, and these weapons will eventually lead to humanity's self-destruction. So which super-weapon is it that would not cause self-extinction? 」

His killing aura… is becoming stronger… and stronger…! Like the increasing fury of a typhoon… but at the eye is calm and unaffected…!

「The answer is the human body. While striving to create a post-nuclear world, the US is trying to develop a super-weapon of equal power–Universal Soldiers … and I am the prototype…! 」

Unconsciously… I took a single step backward.

I'm outmatched…? Even in King-Mode?

「In order to become a deterrent to conflict, Universal Soldiers must be perfect. Undefeated by any threat. Including the exceptionally strong. Now, I will prove that I can defeat an enemy with HSS. Making *her* wish come true…! 」

I get it. Now I completely understand. He is stronger than me now. Looking at me, his eyes reflecting moonlight… there is nothing human about him.

So… that is a super-human…!

Hurry! He is getting stronger. Seeing this, I won't be able to bring him down if his Hysteria Mode becomes any stronger!

Again, clouds swept over the *Galleon*, and within the drifting fog composed of water vapour… Whipping out my DE, I ejected the empty magazine, reloading almost simultaneously, and…

*Bang!

I fired an *Invisible Bullet* aiming to graze his head. In imitation of Reki, I aimed for the unarmoured part of his head, intending to deliver an abrasion to his skull and end things at a blow.

「HaHaHaHa!」

Laughing loudly, while from around him…

Whoosh!

With a sound of a cut air, clouds of water vapour were blown away from him like a mini-explosion had occured.

「…!」

I saw it. Just now… having folded his arms earlier, while opening them he seized my bullet in the fingers of his right hand, slowing it down and grasping it with his left-hand fingers, deflected it as I watched.

That technique..!

At Tokyo Station I had devised a way to deflect the covert sniping of the eldest Cao Cao sister… my *Slash*… this is just like it!

「Suprised? So you can do it too? Something like *Blast*[14].」

So… that's what G-3 calls *Slash*. A while ago, he had protected himself from Reki's sniping. But… such a technique is only acquired in actual combat when you are engaged in life-and-death struggles. Apparently he, like me, has lived through harsh days, battling against fierce and formidable enemies.

However…

My DE had been modded with a selector switch, and I changed it to the 3-bullet burst position.

…Slash can't handle several bullets in rapid-fire!

Because they were the same technique, I also knew it's shortcomings, so I fired a burst of three bullets… G-3 rounded out his mouth and let out a mocking *Phew* as my three bullets rushed toward him–two of them following the same line–, and he shifted his fighting knife to his left hand.

Cla-clang!

From the knife edge, two metallic clanks and two went up. Two bullets were cut in half and each dispersed into a 'Y' shaped path. That… was how I had protected myself from Riko's bullets on Flight ANA-600–*Split*. With that he deflected two bullets at once. The remaining bullet he dealt with using his right hand…

Twist!

To- tornado…!

He'd used The technique I devised in the fight against Watson as well–diverting a bullet with only on hand… Effortlessly. What's more, It was an advanced version. His body remained almost motionless, only his arm moved as he executed it. Without having had any effect, I watched the .50AE bullets vanish into the clouds…

「Those were *Chop* and *Coil*… If you want, I can show you something like *Billiard* that I call *Cracker*?」

G-3 laughed carelessly, as he spoke.

Against G-3… bullets are useless…!

This… is really effective–emotionally, speaking. Have all the enemies I have faced until now felt that same despair? I guess that's Karma for you.

「I already said it, right? Those things are toys! To people like us…」

Giving the wing a kick, G-3 discarded his USP and knife behind him into an empty space …

「Now we can have some fun!」

Clack!

Underfoot the floor gave way and the internal launcher was exposed …

A short-range Air-to Air-Stinger missile!

Whoosh!

Amidst a blinding light and smoke it was fired without any warning

behind the *Galleon*. And leaving behind a tail of smoke, the missile began curve around the clouds slowly as if to make a U-turn. Moving steadily it began accelerating as it moved away…

It's … It's fast …!

It's useless. It's impossible to dodge!

That was a FIM-92C Stinger missile. It's top speed exceeds Mach 2. It's not something that a human being can avoid. Even myself, in King-mode. Furthermore, it's too late to intercept it with my Desert Eagle as well… I'd receive fatal wounds from the flying shrapnel at this range and distance.

「What the hell are you doing?! The *Galleon* won't survive this!」

「Why do I care? Better watch out! What are you going to do, Kinji? HaHaHaHa!」

Laughing as I screamed at him… G-3 was guiding the missile. It's not an IR or UV guidance system. I can't use anything as a decoy to divert it. Is it a proximity fuze? Impact fuze? Time-delay fuze? No, I don't have the time to think about it. The missile is already creeping closer and closer…!

「Shit!」

Suddenly an idea hit me, as for the method,well… I couldn't be sure that it would keep the *Galleon* safe. It was a 50-50 chance. But I'm out of options. It's risky, but it's all I've got. It's now or never if I don't want to die!

「Gaaaaaahhh!」

Tossing my gun, I sighted the missile and beginning to run towards it… Kicking out in order to remain parallel to the wing, I jumped. Then I raised both my fists as the missile came flying in…

Bam!

I put everything I had into a *Double Slash Hammer*. The missile's trajectory was altered to point obliquely downward and flew by just passing below my stomach… But it wasn't enough, a missile is not the same as a bullet. There are several types of fuzes, If it is the normal proximity type, it will explode as it approaches it's target. If that happens, I'll be covered in shrapnel from the missile's body and

die on the spot.

So… one more hit!

「..!」

While in the air, I crashed into the the missile with a no-look kick. It easily opened a hole in the unamoured wing, plunging it's way into the plane's interior.

How about that…!

If I had to give it a name, it would be a "Full-body Slash"–*Slash II*[15]…!

The Galleon was like a paper plane. The thickness of the wings was less than a single meter. If I divert the missile with my *Slash II* as it accelerates, it should penetrate the wing…

Boom!

「..!」

As I landed on the wing, I heard a rumbling sound and a sudden vibration shook the plane.
It… didn't have enough time. It was only a matter of milliseconds. I'd lost my 50-50 bet. Burying itself inside the main wing, the FM-92C Stinger missile *exploded while inside*.

Fwoosh!

Flames went up from the back of the right wing… The black smoke flowed, like blood trailing from a wound. Catching my Desert Eagle that I had thrown up a few moments ago, I was… speechless.

「Gahahaha! Very good, Kinji! I knew that you're a genius!」

The fact that the fuel tank had not been impacted was the one silver lining, but… it's no good… we will crash!

「Sword beats guns. Fist beats sword…!」

Carrying neither gun nor knife, G-3 began walking from the right wing toward the centre. Furrowing his eyebrows, to me he said…

「Now do you understand, Kinji? *These* are our main weapons!」

G-3 clenched his fist and showed it to me.

Now I remember… I heard from Watson that when he escaped from Los Alamos he had annihilated a group of armed soldiers empty-handed. Well, that's entirely possible. Being a Genion, able to entering Hysteria Mode at will, and furthermore, if he possessed all of the techniques that I know, it would be easy.

「…」

Because that would be admitting that I myself was superhuman, I did not want to think about it, however…

G-3's words were correct. Any bladed object is ineffective against me. I stopped Jeanne's sword with two-finger edge catching, and was even able to dodge Sherlock's strikes.

Guns are ineffective against me. How many times was I able to block, divert, and even turn back whatever my enemies hurled at me as I defended myself. Just now I had proved it. Hysteria Mode users can even defend themselves against a missile attack. If two fellow Hysteria Mode users fight…

…It always end up this way, doesn't it?

I re-holstered my DE, going bare-handed. I didn't draw my knife either. Both would just be a waste of time.

The blaze burning inside the right wing was spreading from the tip across the top of the wing. It's only a matter of time before the whole thing burns. Maybe five minutes, maximum. In less than five minutes I have to defeat G-3 and find a way to safely descend from an altitude of 1000 meters. So I have no time to waste.

We'll fight bare-handed. Until the bitter end. If we only compare our respective Hysteria Mode acceleration factors the G-3's is 100 times and mine is 75 time. On a fundamental level there seems to be a large discrepancy between our relative Stats. I'm at a huge disadvantage. Winning would be… difficult. But the only way to survive is to beat him–I have to face him.

Things being difficult, I began to keep time… second by second, each only brought me closer to annihilation. This was much better than giving into the urge to rush him in a kamikaze-style attack. Doing nothing was still better than that, and I can face him here. But then there is Aria's saying: "Difficult" does not mean

“Impossible.” If it’s not “Impossible”, then that means it’s “Possible”. Although it may seem like splitting hairs, I for one firmly believe it’s true, and I’ll prove it.

That’s why I’m going to fight. Even this powerful enemy…!

With the fire behind me… I walked toward the center fuselage– toward G-3. G-3 was also walking towards me. Beneath our feet, the Photo-refractive camouflage had begun to fail, displaying flickering images of the clouds below us. Drifting above us, the scattered clouds formed a thin fog. Around us, there were clouds that stretched on into high heaven faint golden flashes could be seen. They were different from the Cumulus clouds we had been passed through until now. As proof that we had reached high-altitude, Cumulonimbus clouds began to appear. The faint glow… Lightning.

Rather than lose stability because of the fire, the *Galleon* was actually climbing faster . Our altitude must have exceeded 1500 meters. The ambient temperature was below freezing. On our black hair, Tiny ice crystals from the surrounding clouds clung to our black hair turning it ashen grey. Both atmospheric pressure and oxygen concentration had dropped 20%. In a valley of thunder clouds, between fire and water, in low air pressure and oxygen… Under these hellish conditions, a brother’s quarrel will be settled with fists.

Good grief! What the hell is going on with my life? Give me a break!

「I’ll give you one last chance at survival, Kinji. Kneel right here, and say that you will be my follower. In my group we also have girls, and they can all be yours. They’re non-human and brats, but they aren’t so bad to look at. I don’t think there’s a better deal for someone with HSS.」

「You’re kidding me. Throwing in any kind of women makes it a bad deal. You should have done your research.」

I said throwing his own words back at him…

「Things being what they are, you are a indispensably capable person. I intend to beat you without killing you, but I might make a mistake. Your life isn’t so cheap; don’t waste it, Kinji.」

He threw my words back at me also.

「If it’s a waste, then come and waste it!」

As if we were repeating our own words to ourselves… we drew closer to each other. I to him, and him to me.

「You *will* kneel… coughing blood and in tears. And then you will bring me the 『Hidan no Aria』!」

「『Hidan no Aria』…?」

Hear those words again, I paused in my tracks.

「What's that face for? As the nearest person to it, I know that there's *no way* you don't know about it. Fame follows Irokane. The ancients thought that a goddess had appeared and made a huge fuss over it.」

「Goddess? How can that tiny ravenous glutton be a goddess?」

「..You really don't know …? Ah… I get it… Necessary information has been hidden from you.. at least partially.」

Realising he was the only one that understood, G-3 stopped his advance.

「Alright… I'll tell you a little about it. The 『Hidan no Aria』 was predicted by the Scarlet Irokane research– Hyper-ESP. Super-humans with god-like powers on an entirely different level than ESPers.」

The look in his eyes as he spoke… It was like a fanatic religion preaching faith in some god.

「The manifestation of a fraction of that power far exceeded the powers observed by modern ESP science has already been confirmed. You saw it too, right? 『Portal of Heavenly Scarlet Light』 – *The ability to manipulate space-time*.」

The ability to manipulate space-time… Indeed, I've witnessed it.

That time at IU, when Sherlock used it to shoot a bullet of Hihiirokane into the Aria from three years ago.

「What a pity, G-3. That time it worked because she pulled it off together with Sherlock. You might have thought of using me as a hostage against her, but it's ultimately fruitless.」

「She can pull it off by herself, and she already has. Here's an example — remember those pyramid scraps that mysteriously

floated to Japan a few years back?」

Listening to him, I easily recalled it under the influence of Hysteria King-Mode.

Indeed… something like that had happened.

I'd looked through the related data back when I took the 『Odaiba Pyramid bodyguard job』 with Aria. Supposedly, the Odaiba Pyramid was built from the design of that floating pyramid wreckage.

「…Yeah… but what does that old stuff have to do with anything.」

「That's Patra's pyramid. When Aria blasted it with 『Scarlet Heaven』, it was sent to the past.」

「What…!?」

「If you don't believe me, go find those fragments and do your own radiometric dating. That's what I did.」

Hearing such outrageous words– my eyes widened in shock.

That time I only saw the top of the pyramid 『disappearing』… but in reality, it was actually sent to the past…?

「I need the power to control space-time. To that end, I need your help. Of course, I need your subordination first.」

「Why… do you need me?」

「Ah… I can't say that.」

His eyebrow twitching while he scratched his chin, G-3 didn't answer.

「Then I'll ask something else. What do want that power for? Don't tell me you want to change history like in some cliche sci-fi novel?」

「–What good would answering do for me?」

His earlier rough manner and jokes all disappeared.
I stayed silent for a while to pressure him for a response, but he didn't say a word.

…

Something… was hidden deep in his eyes.

Something like sadness… like a longing for someone…

I recalled G-3's past, trying to figure out the answer. And my brain, under the influence of Hysteria King-Mode… let me understand. Let me thoroughly understand.

G-3, wanted to interfere in the past.

His intentions, had to do with what was said back in the warehouse on the day of the Sports Festival.

G-3 — had a loved one.

When he was in Los Alamos, the sole beauty who had treated him gently.

And that person… passed away in an incident during G-3's training.

G-3 was in pain, and blamed himself for her death–

「–You, want to revive Doctor Sarah…!」

「You really do your homework, don't you? …At least when it comes to something like this…」

As if I had touched on a taboo subject, he replied in a low voice.

As expected, he wanted to revive the person he loved – to use Aria's power, to change the past…!

「You should give up on this sort of thing. It's not that I don't understand your feelings, but this is against the laws of nature.」

「As if I'd care about that. I'd go against God if I needed to.」

G-3 held a deep, deep… sincere love for doctor Sarah, I could feel that from his sorrowful eyes.

Even if he died, he still probably wouldn't yield one step.

For love, he wouldn't even hesitate to go against God. For love, he's even thinking about controlling and using gods.

It's not that I don't sympathise, but your plan…. I must stop it here.

I am that goddess' slave, after all.

Firmly renewing my determination, I advanced towards G-3I.

Just then, a part of the Galleon's right wing snapped off with a loud sound. The plane began to list to the right from the changes in the aerodynamic lift.

G-3– he stood there unmoving– eyes closed, facing upward into the sky like he was praying.

So that's it…

He chose to fight me in the air–

「Sarah… watch me . The Genion you dreamed of, a perfect existence…」

–so he could get closer to the heaven that his loved one was in…!

「I will obtain 『Hidan no Aria』 – obtain her, and then I will turn back time. If it's her, I can do it… I will be able to revive you…!」

G-3, at a loss, having thrown everything away– from the sloping left wing, he charged towards me with his right fist tightly clenched.

–*Bam*!

I clashed fists with G-3, sparks literally flying, erupting from my Orochi and his own gauntlet.

G-3 had the advantage in terms of strength. Pushed back by his blow, I somersaulted to lessen its impact,

「——!」

–seizing the opportunity to dodge G-3's instant explosive follow-up kick that seemed to come out of nowhere.

From his leg in the air –*whoosh*– came an explosive videogame-like sound effect.

This is the sound of the surrounding air compressing due to the force of his kick. What kind of strength is this, for him to have reached the limits of subsonic speed?

「!」

No, that was a feint–

G-3's other knee shot upwards, and the left arm I used to the utmost to defend against it was smashed away. Immediately, while my body was sent spinning from the impact, I took the chance to sweep my right leg upward, aiming for G-3's jaw. But my right knee instead collided with his left elbow which he raised to block my kick.

How fast, what a reaction speed he has. The difference between me and him is like racing an electric bike against an F-1 car.

G-3's leg swept down, hitting my left leg with a sound like lightning.

…Heavy…!

I tried to offset the damage done by withdrawing my leg at the moment of impact, but it was no use.

His attacks were extremely heavy, and letting out explosive sounds. This speed – this power, so 100 times Hysteria Mode is this strong, huh?

Having no choice but to roll backwards, I continued retreating. But the right wing was already a sea of flames. There was no escape.

It was as if the inside of the wing was already filled with flames. The surroundings were below freezing, yet it was scorching hot below like a frying pan.

「…!」

Hu…! It looks like the flames had already spread to the front of the plane. And the lower part of the Galleon was already burnt until it started falling apart. I could already see the art G-3 kept, burning up and falling scattered into the sea of clouds.

The plane is disintegrating midair… there's no time left…!

Looking at me who was enduring injuries to both my arms and legs and had a sea of flames behind me, G-3 laughed.

「So you can still stand after eating 4 of my attacks. You can feel proud, Kinji. No one else has ever received a second blow. I killed

them all with one strike.」

「Those attacks were just tickles. Now it's my turn to strike back」

Bluffing, I distributed my weight evenly on both legs… positioned my arms as if I was about to push someone in front of me. I also placed my balance completely in the centre of my body.

–This stance, was the Tohyama family's 『Zetsurou』[16]

Using an application of Aikido, my entire body revolved–a technique that used the power of the opponent's attack and returned it to them in a counterattack.

No matter who the opponent was, as long as they attacked me, they would be counterattacked as if they hit a revolving door–struck back with a blow as heavy as their own attack.

The stronger the enemy the stronger I was, a skill that that borrowed strength to counterattack.

Without Hysteria Mode such a powerful technique would be impossible– a secret of the Tohyama family who killed anyone who witnessed it, but at this point there was no other way.

Ancestors, please don't blame me.

The rule that all witnesses must be killed, ends with my generation.

But, G-3… it was evident he already saw through to what this purely defensive stance meant.

「I don't want to drag out this fight too long either. I'll use 『Meteor』 to tear you to shreds and finish this」

G-3 said as he pointed his left elbow towards me–

He slanted his whole body, his waist and head held low, right leg placed behind, and right fist held up high.

It was similar to the posture used for the sprint in the ancient Olympics… a stance meant to gain speed, I saw through his initial movement.

That's–

Ou, 『Ouka』 …!

There's no mistaking it.

Although the positioning was completely different from my own Ouka, but this–was a posture where all the muscles and bones in the body move simultaneously, releasing a supersonic attack.

This , this really is beyond expectations.

It's definitely too much for 『Zetsurou』.

It's like he said– forget my arm– my entire body would be pierced through.

『Zetsurou』– the revolving door–, he intends to completely destroy it.

「…!」

What to do, Kinji–

An idea flashed through my mind, but will it work? No, even if I did pull it off–

–It's no good. It can't be that easy to win.

He's at 100 times Hysteria Mode, and I'm at 75 times Hysteria Mode.

But… there's no other way…!

「–Sarah, look at me. I am the strongest. A perfect weapon.」

Cough

— Congealing on the floor having come from G-3's mouth…

…*Blood…?*

I saw blood.

G-3 coughed up blood. Even though he apparently didn't even have a scratch on him.

This was probably the Life Limiter– the system we had just discussed that was corroding his body. Perhaps, the 100 times Hysteria Mode also added additional strain to his nervous system.

Seeing that I noticed, G-3–coughing with blood flying out of his mouth– held up his left index finger and waved it at me.

「This is something that's been happening a lot recently. There's no need to worry. For one more attack… I can hold it together.」

The next instant, with eyes wide G-3–

–Whoosh!

With a force greater than a missile, he lowered his body and charged toward me.

His right fist had already reached supersonic speed and– just like the a meteor's tail, it left a conical trail of vapour behind…!

In the exact instant his fist came into contact with my right leg

『Kitsuka』[17]—『*Zetsurou*』—『*Ouka*』*!*

I shifted my centre of mass forward and leapt– in midair, all the muscles in my body moved as one.

Borrowing the force of his 『Meteor』, and channeling it into my leg's 『Ouka』– and returning it!

–Wham—-!

In midair, I struck G-3's shoulder with a roundhouse kick.

「–Uwah——!!」

The golden-edged black armour on his shoulder was shattered into flying fragments.

His shoulder suffered the force of his own 『Meteor』.

The force of the attack was further transferred to G-3's legs, and even his leg armour was broken.

「…!」

I, I did it…!

My legs…I-I'm still standing, although I'm shaking, my leg didn't break at all.

So 75 times Hysteria Mode, can actually do something like that.

Just now– I first received the force of his blow.

Then, in the split-second before my body could endure said force without breaking, I used Ouka **in the opposite direction**. If I had to give it a name, it would be 『Kitsuka』. This is a second, speed-reducing defence form of 『Ouka』.

This was an entirely new technique, named after the orange blossoms that appear after cherry blossoms bloom.

Next, I used 『Zetsurou』 and switched from defense to offense–

Just as my roundhouse kick was about to land, I re-accelerated with 『Ouka』 to further add to its speed.

–The non self-injurious, subsonic version of 『Ouka』 that I created by chance during the battle with Watson at the Skytree.[18]

Hysteria King-mode has really proved itself…

To think that in an instant, I could pull off such a complex skill, and furthermore, that last-ditch counterattack completely reversed the tables, leading to my victory.

But… not everything went smoothly.

Being somewhat reckless, my leg was injured to a similarly considerable extent. Even so a partially self-injurious 『Ouka』 was enough.

「…Ugh…!」

Likewise, the Genion before me wasn't beaten with just one attack.

Clutching his injured right shoulder, he was was forced to fall back a step.

Falling to his knees on the left wing, G-3 uncontrollably coughed up yet another mouthful of blood.

He has… already hit his limit.

「Let's stop here，G-3…!」

The entire right wing was already engulfed in flames. Already, it

was falling into ruin, crumbling as it were disintegrating.

Forced forward by the flying sparks, I could only limp– as if I were chasing him, towards the fuselage.

「I can see that you can't fight anymore, and my leg is also no good. This battle is a draw」

「Bullshit…*cough*! Ugh…」

G-3 coughed up… even more blood.

Even though he used his hand to block it, his mouth was already covered in blood.

As expected, 100 times Hysteria Mode was too much to endure.

「Now's not the time to act tough! The Galleon's already about to…!」

As I pointed to the wing, the front of the plane that was aflame– *rumble*–exploded like a oil tanker, setting blazing flames alight.

The fuel tank over there had ignited……!

「Uwoh…… ! 」

The scorching flames crackled and swirled; the hot wind chasing me, I ran to the left wing.

That moment, G-3… knees trembling, stood.

Such willpower. He had received my 『Ouka』 just moments earlier.

But to think that he was on one knee for just about ten seconds… and stood up again!

「…Sarah, look at me. Am I not perfect? Something like this is nothing」

No, this isn't willpower at all.

G-3–only knows battle.

He can only express himself through battle.

And right now, he is trying to to express himself. To the one he loves.

Who… is no longer in this world…!

「G-3, you are not perfect at all! You should understand that yourself!」

「No, I am the perfect–*cough*! Universal Soldier! This…this is Sarah's dream– As a weapon, I, have to be perfect!」

「Kicked by me until you cough up blood, and calling a woman's name in the end, how is that perfect! You're not perfect! Wake up! Humans aren't perfect!」

「Human… you say? I haven't fallen that far!」

「You've already fallen! You've– always felt that you were human. That's why, you wanted to meet……you came back to meet us right!? To meet me, and Kana……!

「…!」

Perhaps he didn't even realise it himself; when G-3 heard my words, he made an astonished expression.

The fire had already spread to the fuselage behind me.

The entire Galleon had become a fireball.

Its Photo-refractive Camouflage had broken-down, exposing the glossy black surface of the left wing.

「–Why is it, Kinji?」

「What do you mean?」

「Why is it that you're on that side, and I'm on this one」

Understanding that there was no time left before the Galleon crashed, G-3 laughed at himself…

「I, really wanted to be you. I wanted the fate that chose you and not me when we were born. I wanted to live that shitty, ordinary life you had…」

G-3, as if he were about to shake hands, stretched out his right arm.

「Come, Kinji. You still have moves you haven't used yet, right? Just like me–a trump card」

Understanding what he was about to do, I said…

「If I use that you'll regret it. In that, I've only ever lost to my Nii-san」

「I've never lost in that to anyone–not even to Fourth」

So it's the same for all of us– our family's trump card.

「…」

「…」

G-3 and I, hooked the arms we used to hurt each other with together.

Our bodies had already reached the limit… and the plane below us was about to crash. This is the end.

But, looking at him from this distance… he really does look like me.

G-3 who also seemed to be thinking the same thing, let out a bitter laugh.

I… and G-3 –like mirror images– leaned our heads backwards.

Our arms and legs full of injuries from battle… we were going to use what was left– our heads.

Sigh

To think that, people who possess the same genes, even our trump card is exactly the same.

–*Crash*——!!!

Like two bulls, G-3 and I gathered all our strength and head-butted each other.

「Stubborn Bastard… what kind of rock do you have for a head…!」

「Aren't you talking about yourself…!?」

And then–the second collision!

–*Crash*——-!!!

Now I can see, G-3 is clearly shaking now.

Haha! Looks like I have the advantage. It's going almost completely my way.

–*Crash*——-!!!

The third was the finishing blow

「Hahaha……Hahahahaha…… 」

Laughing, G-3 fell on his back, as if I had knocked him down.

thump… below me, he lay sprawled like a '大' character.

「..It isn't the time or place for laughing, you know… 」

I said as I got up, but now… all I could do was laugh as well.

Fire had spread to the left wing. There's already nowhere to escape.

And it was impossible to take back control of the aircraft, no matter how you look at it. An emergency water landing was also impossible. Meanwhile, the fuselage was burning up bit by bit.

「–Don't make such a sad face, Kinji 」

G-3 said this and…*crack* *crack*, tore open the destroyed portion of his back armour. And with a rattle, and placed something next to me.

「Although it's a small one, it's enough for one person to descend 」

Inside his back armour was–probably made of cutting-edge synthetic fibres– a small size parachute peeked out.

「…What will you do? 」

「I said don't make that kind of face. I–will just go to where that person is 」

On the burning left wing… G-3I laid like a 大 character, unmoving.

He… wants to die here in the sky.

「What are you saying…!」

Just as I reached out to grab G-3's left hand and pull him up–the left wing must have been more damaged than it appeared–the wing collapsed, and he fell through!

「——!」

Lying on my stomach at the very edge of the wing, I finally managed to stop G-3 from falling.

As they fell, the Galleon's fragments created small puffs of mist as they hit the clouds far below. Looking at this distance… our altitude seems to be about 2000 metres. But to the clouds, it may only be a hundred.

With me holding on to his left arm hanging mid-air–G-3 twisted his bloody mouth into a bitter laugh.

「Kinji. Let go.」

「Come up…!」

「That's enough. Nii-san」

「…!」

My body surrounded by the hot wind, I widened my eyes in response to his words.

He's my…

「Ah… I'm so happy. Before I die, I was able to see the face of my Nii-san」

…Younger brother…!

If it's like that then…

I can't let go…!

「As the older brother… how could I, sacrifice my younger brother…!」

At my words, G-3 laughed again.

「The younger brother, can't sacrifice his older brother either」

click…

With that sound, The left arm-armour I was holding–separated from G-3's body.

「——!」

Along with debris from the Galleon's, his body gradually became smaller and smaller… disappearing into the clouds.

「G-3! G-3!」

Why.

Why did you have to do this–

I still have a lot of things I want to say to you. I wanted to be together with you, as brothers… and live!

「You stupid bast–a–rd!!!!!!!!!!」

Amidst the swirling flame and cloud, my scream–

–only echoed.

(End Text)

End of Chapter 4

****

1. This is the kanji reading. The katakana says: 'meta-materila ghillie (suit)'– Anon-san

2. The quote comes from the Book of Sirach. I replaced the text with an English version. Here is what it says in Japanese: 'The Lord reveals the past and the future, and bring what was hidden out into the light'.– Anon-san

3. This is an armed forces technique to reload the gun without taking your eyes of the target or breaking stance. Here is a demonstration.

4. This was a little tricky to translate, because it is a coined term. The kanji say: 'Chaotic angle particle lift' (角動揚力粒子). The katakana say: Dean-Bit (デイーン・ビット). After a few hours research, I think it means a Dean Drive.

A Dean Drive is a type of fictional reaction-less drive that does not require propellant to work. A Dean Drive is supposed to use rotary motion from a self contained system to generate uni-directional force for propulsion. This description seems to fit the Kanji meaning.

5. Link. Trance music itself seems to have a fast tempo to get people excited then it slowly fades out. Maybe it works like a drug for G-3– getting him on a 'high' then bringing him 'down' again?– AGlingua

6. Para-sexual desires that grant sexual satisfaction from fantasies concerning visual media or statuesque figures, respectively.

7. This is a theatre term for a stage exit in case this is unclear.

8. 'KH' or 'Key Hole' (Code-named 'Misty') is the designation for a series of US reconnaissance satellites that incorporate stealth technology. Most agree that the series in current use reaches KH-13. KH-14 is the fictional(?)successor to the KH-13.

9. Link. Apparently a great gun for accuracy and target tracking with follow-up shots.

10. The Katakana say 'Cannon', but the Kanji read: 'chain/linked shooting'.

Also known as 'carom'– shortened from Carombole Billiards. The the term means that the cue ball hits two other balls in one shot– the aim of the game.

11. The Kanji read 'Fiber bullet'.

12. In the original the expanded acronym was given as "Skilled Detective Armed". I decided to keep it in acronym form because it doesn't make much sense in English.

13. The "Cross" here refers to an intersection (Like streets or something crossing and connecting) or a genetic cross-pairing. In light of things revealed later in the text, it could be read "Golden Stud", but we didn't like that too much… LOL!

14. The kanji for *"Blast"* is almost identical to those used for Kinji's *"Slash"*, substituting the kanji "dispel" or "drive away" in *Blast* for the "divert" used in *Slash*. The same goes for all subsequent technique names.

15. “Guided missile diversion” in Kanji.

16. ‘Absolute Prison’ in Kanji.

17. Similar in name to Kinji’s Ouka (Cherry Blossom) this is named ‘Orange Blossom’.

18. What Kinji seems to have done is to accelerate backwards with a reverse ‘Ouka’–re-named ‘Kitsuka’–to lessen the relative speed between himself and G-3, allowing him to use ‘Zetsurou’ to turn G-3’s Meteor back on himself, and then use a less powerful ‘Ouka’ to add additional force to his kick.

****

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Epilogue/ GO FOR NEXT!

(Begin Text)

「——That bastard G-3!」

A FedEx package with the sender's name, 『Angus, Friend of Deen』, arrived at my home where I was recuperating… When I moved to play back the DVD that came in the envelope, I inadvertently banged my leg on the table, and since it was the leg that I used Zetsurou with, I writhed in agony as I hugged my leg.

On the TV, flying a sport kite on the paradisical beach…

『Hahaha. How's this Aniki? Not too bad, eh?』

…was G-3, who seems to have gotten a new artificial arm.

On the white sand, his female followers were playing beach volley ball in their swimsuits.

Angus was the one who was probably filming as G-3 flew his Oodako[1] kite in his black coat…I could tell at a glance it was the gold-threaded overcoat he had worn on the Galleon.

That bastard!

He shows me a face like he was going to die– then changes his mind as he falls.

It seems that his coat must be made of the same P-Fiber that Kaname had, and he glided to safety like a paper aeroplane.

As for me, after landing in the water with the parachute, I was adrift in Sagami Bay for 24 hours. I also unluckily ran into a shark in the early morning and had to chase it away with my DE.

With great difficulty, I was rescued by a fishing boat and, finally reaching Kotsubo harbour, managed to get into contact with Butei High and they said I was 『 on my own responsibility』, so in the end I took the JR Yokosuka line back into Tokyo. Out of my own pocket, of course.

Of course, midterm examinations at Butei High started the next day.

I did sit properly for all of them– although they were all flunks. Up until Phys. Ed., I used pencil-roulette.

And that jerk, to think you're so leisurely and carefree… running off to the Caribbean for a holiday.

「Shit, Shit!」

Even my half-price bento rattled as I hit the table.

Seeming to realise this video message was intended for me, The fox-eared girl, Tsukumo, ran in front of the camera lens and stuck her tongue out at me before the scene ended.

Then, the next scene was a luxurious restaurant–

「Kana. Take care of that good-for-nothing brother Kinji for me. I can't be bothered anymore.」

Wearing magnificent clothes like a celebrity, G-3 was stuffing his face with a 5 cm thick beefsteak and drinking red wine.

…It seems like this video message was also sent to Kana.

「Third-sama. Shouldn't this have been sent to Kana alone?」

「It would be troublesome if Kinji Tohyama attacked. Your injuries haven't completely recovered yet.」

Wearing evening dresses, the worried Tsukumo and the others said as much–

「Shut up! My fighting spirit will heal these wounds!」

….He's putting on his fake-tyrant image. He's just the same as ever…

「Oi, are you watching, Aniki? A stupid E-Rank Butei like you dared to call a Genion a 「stupid bastard」. That's insulting Sarah's research. It made me so angry that I forgot about dying. And I'll say this right now–I don't think I lost to you. That was a draw, I'll be coming to Tokyo to play with you later.』

Please don't.

「I'll still be coming even if you don't want me to. We'll play for the 「Hidan no Aria」 and fight again next time.」

…That bastard. Even if it's on video, you shouldn't point your fork at people.

「–Basically, I'm telling you the case is closed. Also… take good care of Kaname」

The video ended with those words.

「…」

Just now…

… he said it. Not G-4, but 『Kaname』.

Seriously…

I suddenly realised that my reflection in the now-darkened TV screen… was unexpectedly smiling. If only bitterly.

Nii-san, Kaname, and now G-3… these siblings of mine… why are they all so difficult to deal with. Seriously.

Although, I guess if you asked them, they'd probably say I'm the same too.

****

In Butei High, the first four periods of the day are regular classes, but from the fifth period onward are specialised subject classes. In between them is a break period for moving between buildings and lunch.

With the fatigue of the battle with G-3 and midterm examinations following each other, tired in both body and mind, I……decided to nap for a bit before heading over to Inquesta and slumped over my desk.

Glossing over the noisy Riko and Mutou, when all signs of life disappeared from the classroom…

「Kinji.」

…*Fwhoosh!*

Hearing Aria's anime voice, I reflexively sat upright.

Of course, this isn't because I have any good feelings towards Aria, but the last 8 times I was busted pretending to sleep, my chair was tossed along with me in a Dory Funk Junior-esque belly-to-back suplex. Furthermore, on two of those occasions I was thrown out of the classroom window entirely.

「What is it? I'm tired」

As I pushed Aria aside, too late I realised she already had grabbed the back my chair… and that Aria and I were the only ones left in the classroom.

Furthermore, the classroom door had been locked from the inside. Did Aria do that?

「I was waiting for everyone to leave. If Riko were here, it would be troublesome later.」

「What?」

「I wanted to praise you. For the fight with G-3. It must have been hard.」

During my return journey, I called the vice-leader of Baskerville, Aria, from the Zushi station platform and told her about what had happened in the sky.

Of course, leaving out everything about Hysteria Mode and Irokane.

「I heard from Watson, G-3 is an R-ranked Butei」

「He was half sick. I just got lucky that time」

「Even so. It's a really impressive victory.」

「He only called it a draw.」

「Didn't Assault teach you? Victory in a battle isn't determined by acknowledgement. but instead by the changes in the situation around you after the battle. You beat G-3 back–you succeeded in repelling him by force. It's a clear victory.」

With a slight noise, Aria sat down at my desk with a grin, smiling an adorable cat-like smile.

「T-Then winning and losing don't mean anything! Call it whatever you want!」

Caught off-guard, I hurriedly turned my head to the side.

Don't panic.

Aria is talking to me while smiling happily. Impossible.

「The damage Baskerville suffered is not too serious–I had light injuries. Riko had a nosebleed. Shirayuki and Jeanne need 3 days to recover.」

You are all incredibly tough.

Especially Riko. Taking a nasty attack from G-3, and ending up with a nosebleed.

「So, I'm going to give you a reward. From today onwards, with every victory earned, the reward will increase accordingly. So what would you like first?」

The top of my head firmly grasped, I had no choice, but was forced to face Aria…

Confronted directly, I was unable to speak.

The other day, I said something or other about 『making juice』, and she crushed an apple, single-handed. This girl…

「Then let me sleep five more minutes.」

「What do you want? Alright, time's up. Please tell me what you'd like.」

What is this–in-your-face kind of reward? And what's more, my earnest request was being completely ignored?

Well then, I could use some ammunition.

「I won't cover any personal expenses.」

My wish was canceled.

「I don't need anything. Even if you gave me something, wouldn't have a place to put it.」

「Did you see me bring a wrapped present? Besides things, what else… I could… give… that…t-to y-you!?」

Aria's breathing…　became rapid.

It's like a cat getting excited when it sees it's favourite food.

Just what is going on inside her head?

「But, but only to the necessary extent. This place is as good as any. So hurry up! Desertion in the face of the enemy is against school rules!」

From Aria whose face was drawing close towards me–

Some kind of female hormones were being secreted, that had a very womanly aura.

「–In the sky–」

Her jasmine fragranced lips kept getting closer to my face as she spoke softly in her anime voice.

「Reki watched. She said she saw the flaming aircraft–when she said it exploded at the end… I, didn't cry.」

Aria–

「Because I believed that Kinji would definitely live and come back.」

…

Ah, Oi!

What are you doing. Why did you close your eyes.

With me in the empty classroom. Hugging my head.

And m-my mouth and her's are coming closer…!

Why? I don't know why. I really don't know why I have closed my eyes–

–The next instant,

「Now that's out!」

Clang!

Above us, one of the ceiling boards shifted open, and a uniformed

Kaname stretched her feet downward.

Her legs coiling around Aria's neck and, hands on the edge of the ceiling tile exerting all of her strength as if doing a chin-up, Kaname pulled Aria upwards.

「Urk!」

Her neck locked between Kaname's thighs and calves, suspended in midair, it was like Aria was being… h-hanged.

Kaname gave this a name, 『*Figure-4 Hanging Tree*』[2] *was it…!?*

Kaname, this technique is beyond belief.

It seems this little sister of mine is also an inventor of new techniques.

「Hu～ That was dangerous, Onii-chan. It's no good if you're not careful you know? I think Aria is the type that turns into a wild animal if she crosses that line.」

「W-Wha?」

Her legs still wrapped around Aria's neck, Kaname said with a smile–

After suffering G-3's attack, as I expected, she was saved by Kana.

She was also nursed by Watson later, and treated with Shirayuki's supernatural abilities… So now, as you can see, she's alive and kicking– to the extent that not even a scar was left behind.

You could say G-3's goal that I pointed out midair, had been accomplished.

Kaname had also believed it, and I didn't tell her about G-3. And according to Watson's investigation, even though the USA had been monitoring, the official report states 『There was a falling-out between G-4 and G-3 and G-4 was killed. 』.

Watson upon receiving this news, reached out to her Liberty Mason superiors and successfully prevented further investigation into this sanctioned cover-up.

All in all, it turned out quite well. As for the secret leaking out… there's no helping it. If it happens; it happens.

But I will protect her. No matter who my opponent is. Although it's only half, we truly are siblings.

「Well, that's that, Onii-chan. I still need to dispose of Aria with decisively compulsive force.」

Happily dragging the limp Aria with her back into the ceiling in a flash, Kaname gave me a wink as she replaced the ceiling tile.

Kaname.

Speaking of which, when you were still G-4… And you talked with me for the first time, by video on Reki's cell phone, you winked like that too.

But right now, you look much better than back then. Although, there's not much difference.

As for you, Aria.

I never figured out what that in-your-face reward was just now, but, you should listen to your own words. You've been forcibly repelled by Kaname, so should that count as a loss?

****

Then, something happened that changed my perpetually miserable life.

After Inquesta lessons, the bespectacled beauty Yutori Takamagahara-sensei beckoned for me… she made me wait with her until the other students had left the lecture hall.

After that incident with Kaname, I couldn't help but watch the ceiling.

「Tohyama-kun. I have received an important message, come with me to MASTERS.」

As Takamagahara-sensei said this, she adjusted my tie for me.

Summoned… to MASTERS?

This is not good. It's one of the three most dangerous places at Tokyo Butei High.

But why would I be called there? Were my test scores that bad? No, I can't imagine that our lazy teachers have already finished grading the tests.

Ah. I get it! This must be like that time in my first year when they drew names for 'Quests'. [3]

I'll be appreciative. This gives me the opportunity to earn some extra credits.

While running a mental calculation, I began making myself presentable as Takamagahara-sensei led me along… and, finally. we entered MASTERS.

It's really been a long since I visited MASTERS. This should be the first time in 5 months since Aria forced me to sneak in.

Getting into the elevator–going up…

…Eh… the fifth floor?

That's even higher than the teachers' offices. I haven't been there before.

While pondering this, Takamagahara-sensei and I reached the fifth floor lobby.

There, Ranbyou-sensei met us while wearing a business suit…

「–Reki?」

I said aloud.

Her sailor-suit scarf tidily arranged, Reki was also there.

「…」

Silent as usual, Reki just looked at me.

…?

Yutori Takamagahara-sensei is the homeroom teacher of class 2-A, and I'm in class 2-A.

As for Ranbyou, she is class 2-C's homeroom teacher. And Reki–is in class 2-C.

So it seems that the homeroom teachers have brought their respective students here.

「So this term, it's these 2?」

「So it seems. The two of them are good children, so it is regrettable, but it can't be helped, I suppose.」

The teachers spoke such words–and glancing at the clock, their expressions were becoming strained.

–What's going on? This is my first time seeing you guys like this!

To think the Hong Kong Mafia daughter, Ranbyou, would be nervous… is this a joke?

And you, Takamagahara-sensei. I heard that before you were rendered unable to fight by a sniper bullet to the head, you were known as the feared mercenary 「Bloody Yutori」. So why are you nervous?

「Uh… why am I here?」

I now belatedly asked, and Takamagahara-sensei turned toward me.

「Oh, yes. Right now, the two of you have been granted a meeting with the headmaster」

–Headmaster?

We're… going to meet headmaster Takeru Midorimatsu?

「Let's go! It's time. Butei should be punctual!」

Ranbyou said, gently ushering Reki and me to walk down the fifth floor corridor… stopping in front of the door with the nameplate reading 『Headmaster's Office』.

Made of a slightly rich wood… but it was an extremely ordinary door.

The headmaster was surely inside.

Thinking about it, I was nervous as well.

The only one who could remain calm, was Reki who was just standing there stupidly stiff.

Ranbyou and Takamagahara-sensei exchanged glances, then nodded in agreement.

「Midorimatsu-san, sorry for the disturbance. This is Takamagahara. I have brought this semester's 2 students to you.」

Through the door, we heard…

「Yes, Yes. Come in」

An ordinary… nondescript male voice replied.

With a *click*, the door opened… Inside, common houseplants and the headmaster's desk adorned the office.

「Very good, very good. Good to see you. I am Midorimatsu」

Smiling kindly at his desk, I couldn't decide if it was an 'older brother' or 'kindly uncle' kind of face.

This person–is the headmaster?

I should have seen him at each the opening and closing ceremonies of every year, so his face should be familiar…

I **can't remember** this person.

I can't pin down even a vague impression of this person. None of his features stand out. And this, is exactly why he is well known and feared in Butei society.

His nickname– 「The Transparent Man」.

But, he's not like G-3 who uses optical technology to disappear. It's completely different, utilising psychological techniques… He… has the ability to **not be remembered** by people.

You see him, but you don't. You can't remember. Unaware. You will overlook him entirely. Because he simply doesn't have any features.

I don't understand how it works, but one idea is that his manner, movements, voice, and even physical height and weight are that of the average Japanese person's–so no matter how many times you see him, it is impossible to remember. Even if someone asked 「What kind of person is he?」, one could only answer 「Uhh… he's a man……」 and end there.

In other words, if this man targets you, you're dead.

No matter where you met him, he wouldn't be noticed. He would be overlooked. Unstoppable. Even if someone said he was targeting you, you wouldn't be able to sense him.

So… once you met Midorimatsu, you'd know were already finished. That's just how it is.

I can't imagine why such a dangerous person became headmaster, but that is exactly the kind of person that the headmster of Butei High is.

「I am Kinji Tohyama.」

「I am Reki.」

In MASTERS, no matter what office you entered it was required to report your name. Reki and I did so……

「Yes, yes. Then we have an important announcement for you.」

His voice was flat, expressionless, as Midorimatsu, indifferently, calmly went on–

「Class 2-A, number 23, Kinji Tohyama-Kun. Class 2-C, number 35, Reki-san. At the end of the month, you two–will be expelled from Tokyo Butei High.」

Go For The NEXT!!!

(End Text)

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1. Traditional Japanese large square kites.

2. This name refers to the shape of the numeral ‘4’ made when Kaname tucks her legs under Aria’s neck, leaving Aria hanging vertically underneath.

3. ‘Quests’ in Katakana. The name for ‘contracts’ or ‘jobs’ accepted by Butei.

****

Special Thanks to our new Team Members: **Jialat** and **Frozzendeth**, without whom this volume would still be stuck in translation limbo.

Afterword

HO HO HO! Thanks for waiting! This year I, Akamatsu-Santa, have also come bringing the 11 volumes of this novel, the 5 volumes of the manga and the 3 volumes of Hidan no Aria AA—all for sale at the same time!

And also I bring the expected ‘Questions and Answers’ Section of Hidan no Aria Volume 11!

Q: Please tell us the origin of Haimaki’s name!

Yes, yes, Haimaki! The name of the white wolf Reki adopted, right? ‘Haimaki’ is a word from the language of Ulus, the fictional tribe described in the novels. The Ulus language is a language combining words from Japanese, Russian and other languages of the Altai area. ‘Haimaki’ is a word originated from Japanese ‘shiro’ meaning: ‘white’. (It can be confused as a debased form of the word 'hachimaki', which means headband)

In short, in Japanese it would be like ‘shiro’ which is a very popular name for a dog. For you, the one who is thinking that Reki has no creativity! In the traditions of the Ulus, ‘white’ is not just a color. They are the offspring of the Genji clan. Remembering that in the Minamoto-Hei war the Genji clan carried a white banner while the Heike clan carried the red banner, they see the colour white as an omen of good fortune. So Reki, taking advantage of the coincidence with Haimaki’s color, gave him his name a lucky colour .

Q: Although Kinji changed his mobile, does he still have his Leopon's strap?

Thanks to his lack of tact, his misfortune is that he always ends up getting very close to Shirayuki and Riko, and Aria always ends up shooting at Kinji because of it... but that is part of being a Butei. Resigned that ‘there is no way to stop being shot’ he began to look for a pattern in the ‘days when he is not shot at so much.’ So he began keeping a log. One day he realized that when the Leopon strap was on his mobile, he was shot at much less than the days without it! But as he does not understand girls, he also did not understand the reason behind this... So he uses the Leopon as a ‘ward’ against Aria’s bullets and wears it daily on his mobile. It is common to carry an amulet as protection against bullets, although

it is usually against the enemy.

Well, this, the 11th volume ended with the big problem of Kinji's 'expulsion'! What will happen now?! That would be the first big question .. whose answer I will write in the next volume.

So we'll see you next time, in a nice place amidst the sweet aroma of cherry and orange blossoms.

A certain day in December 2011

—Akamatsu Chuugaku

Three black-and-white and one colour picture made this a ‘Festival of Swimsuits’.

They were very fun to draw!

Please support us in volume 12.

—Kobuici

Hidan no Aria - Volume 11

G Bloodline -Collateral Bros-

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I went ahead and adjusted the color curve of some of the b&w images, because they were hard to see. The original images can be found at Baka-Tsuki. Really sorry if this annoyed you.